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# When I Die, I Won't Stay Dead: The Poetry of Bob Kaufman

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**WHEN I DIE, I WON'T STAY DEAD: THE POETRY OF BOB KAUFMAN**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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M.A., San Francisco State University, 1981

M.F.A., Louisiana State University, 1988

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*For my sister Barbara Ann, who encouraged my educational pursuits, and for  
Donald Kaufman, who though dying, helped me to know his brother.*

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## Preface

This Dissertation on Bob Kaufman came to me unexpectedly. Bob Kaufman's poems are powerful, complex, and well-loved. Though criticism was beginning to appear when I started my project, little specific detail about the man had been revealed. During my journey of inquiry into the life and work of Robert Gernal Kaufman, many people along the way have asked how I came to this project. Here is my answer.

Bob Kaufman's work was recommended to me by a friend, now deceased, named Elluage Anthony Carson, a surrealist poet who was much in the Kaufman tradition. We met in Nelson Bentley's writing workshop at the University of Washington; Professor Bently was the poetic father of us all, urging us to study poetic forms and the discipline coming with it, while allowing us our dearest poetic pursuits, namely breaking the rules. We were undergraduates, full of passion and a great love of all literature, but especially newly published Black literature. Elluage and I were also students and mentees of Black writer Colleen McElroy. It was under her care, and her grooming of us in the United Black Artists' Guild that we blossomed. Colleen led us to the works and lives of writers who began like us, who looked like us, and spoke like us, whose families didn't always understand why they needed to do this writing thing; she knew we must, and we did.



Like Kaufman, Elluage was often thought of as a bohemian, living here and there, sometimes making it off of the kindness of friends. In his writing, Elluage was quite surreal as well, and after ethereal. To this day, I cannot remember what he did for a living; he was always writing, reading his works to anyone who would listen. When Elluage was low on cash, he sold books from his voluminous library, which is how I came to own my copy of *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* and Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, books, Elluage insisted, I had to read if I were to become a writer.

Elluage was astonished that I didn't know Kaufman or Cruse. How could I not know Bob Kaufman? I had to read him. No, I had to inhale him. How could I be a Black artist and not read Cruse? I must make both a part of my daily consciousness raising efforts, which Elluage urged with all sincerity, and I did. Like many Bob Kaufman aficionados, I carried *Solitudes* with me like a bible, reading but mostly studying, entering his head scape, at once so foreign and familiar. Cruse required more study; the Harlem Renaissance became my Holy Grail; I could never digest enough about the work of Black writers and intellectuals from the turn of the twentieth century onward. Elluage would tell me what he knew of Kaufman's life and that sadly, he must be dead, because no one had heard from him in years. I kept Kaufman's poems close, knowing he was a New Orleans Black poet; in fact, he was from my neighborhood. So an additional bond was formed; Bob Kaufman was my home-blood and a poet.

It was not until I was part of the Black writers' workshops at the African American Historical and Cultural Society in San Francisco that I met Bob Kaufman. We were in a round-table discussion on the Black literary tradition; Bob Kaufman, alone,

appeared in the library, and quietly listened to us while looking into our eyes. At some point, we spoke of favorite writers; at another time, we read a poem representative of our work. After most people left and since Bob Kaufman didn't speak throughout, I asked Devorah Major, then Poet in Residence and later San Francisco Poet Laureate, who was that guy? That's Bob Kaufman, she said. Shocked, relieved he was alive, but angry I didn't recognize him, and that I didn't get a chance to speak to him, I resolved that the next time I would know him. That was in early 1980. Soon after that, *Ancient Rain* appeared, and the artistic community was buzzing with Kaufman anecdotes. While I was able to get a glimpse of him on occasion, I was not able to get close enough to speak with him.

Later, in 84 and 85 after *Ancient Rain* celebrations toned down, and during my tenure as Poet in Residence at the African American Historical and Cultural Society, Bob Kaufman showed up at the Cultural Center on occasion to hear us younger poets read. Sometimes he came alone; sometimes he was accompanied by his companion Lynn Wildey, a poet in her own right. Bob, though obviously in fragile health, continued to participate in benefit readings. One in particular, the Poets for Peace reading hosted by Herman Berlandt, stopped when Bob arrived; everyone gave him a standing ovation. But it was in 1985, when Naomi Long Madgett was our featured guest at the African American Historical and Cultural Society that Bob came and greeted her and Conyus Calhoun, then poetry editor of *The Black Scholar*. It was then that we talked.

Bob Kaufman, a slight brown-skinned man with a big talent, spoke that night in a raspy voice, now and then thick with wheezing. He remembered hearing my work that

first time I saw him, and again at the Poets for Peace reading. “A Crescent City girl” he called me, from his neighborhood, no doubt, he said. “Yeah-ya-right Mr. Galvez Greens,” I rang out. He laughed and coughed. I apologized for not having recognized him that first time. Oh, I knew his work even then Kaufman said, and his eyes conveyed that he was pleased, shaking his head. He never thought young Black writers would read him, discuss him, and hold him in such regard. “How long had this been going on?” He wanted to know, and I told him about Elluage Anthony Carson; and while he thought it a bit much that anyone would emulate him, he was delighted, his head still shaking (something he couldn’t help, I learned later).

In late 1985, once I knew that the South called me home, I told most folks who were kindred spirits about my move. Poet Lynne Wildey and I spoke of Bob and poetry. Lynne urged me to meet Bob’s family in New Orleans and to tell them about him, since he hadn’t been home for some time. We agreed to swap poems, something we didn’t get to do much. After Bob Kaufman left this life, it was Lynne Wildey who called me in Baton Rouge to tell me he had passed, and that I should write about Bob since I was from his home. It was her belief that I would understand something of Bob’s perspective, and he would trust me to do so. I was touched, overwhelmed, and felt wholly unprepared for such an undertaking.

In the meantime, my energy, research, and writing had been consumed with the Oral Tradition, the lore of Black males and Black kids, documenting and presenting that research. With the M.F.A. in Creative Writing behind me, initially, I thought that I could translate my folklore research into a dissertation. Once in the Ph.D. program, it was in

reviewing possible dissertation topics in Black poetry that I began to discuss Bob Kaufman with Dr. John Lowe. With his interest engaged, it was Dr. John Lowe, my major professor, who first suggested that Kaufman research and scholarship would be ground breaking and necessary; already hooked on Bob, I was excited at the idea and began what came to be a journey. Also, the continued urging of Lynne Wildey to meet Bob's family had an effect. She wrote to me in 1988<sup>1</sup> to relate work with David Henderson on the K.P.F.A. (Pacifica Radio) tribute to Bob; she wanted to send me a copy of the broadcast to present and as an introduction to Bob's family, particularly Bob's sister Marion, who was considered the family historian. Lynne Wildey also mentioned meeting Louisiana Poet Yusef Komunyakaa at National Poetry Week. Lynne was interested to learn that Yusef taught Bob's poetry, and she noted that she would be seeing Yusef over the holidays. It was Lynne who pointed me to Barbara Christian's seminal article on Bob Kaufman. At the time, Lynne was working on a book about Bob, which was to include a large number of photos from their time together, including shots of Bob at readings and gatherings of friends. In her letter, she said Al Young had been particularly "sweet and helpful" with ideas for the book. She commented that she was "wrestling with some darker information, how to allude to these problematic truths in a spiritual and untacky light. Mercy for the living," she called it.

In her package to me, Lynne included an article by George Williamson of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on the naming of streets after Beat principals, including Bob. My copy of the K.P.F.A. tape didn't come through her however. Actually, David Henderson called me in Baton Rouge urging me to request the broadcast from local stations in New

Orleans, and he would send a copy. Finally, Kalamu ya Salaam, New Orleans poet and publisher, who had spoken to David, made arrangements to air the Kaufman tribute on his weekly program “Kitchen Sink” on W.W.O.Z. Later, Kalamu gave me a copy of the tape. Consequently, the research and writing on this Bob Kaufman dissertation began.

As for Bob Kaufman’s family, finally, I did meet his sister Marion, by phone, in 1993. It took years to find her as her phone was unlisted and her name changed by marriage. I found her through Bob’s younger brother Donald. She was, as Lynne Wildey suspected from Bob’s cue, the family historian. Marion was a former teacher and history buff. She alone had important clues about the Kaufman brew, but much of that died with her. It wasn’t difficult to find people who knew the siblings, but none were talking except Donald. After a series of phone conversations, my first interview with Donald was in 1993. He admired and loved Bob, had lived with him during his time in Texas and the early San Francisco days, and provided my introduction to Marion, but she died before we actually met. Marion traveled to San Francisco for Bob’s funeral in 1986, and she brought stories home of the poetry readings that were held after the funeral, as well as the New Orleans style Second Line procession for Bob in San Francisco streets. The remaining sisters kept a close rein on the information Donald provided; I would ask him questions, and he would get back to me after discussing it with his sisters; this went on for a year. What Donald told me enabled me to search further and make connections. I met Bob’s sisters, Mrs. Joyce Perkins, and Mrs. Marlene Blackwell, at the funeral Mass of their brother Donald. I presented that K.P.F.A. broadcast earlier to Donald, and again to Bob’s sister Joyce. After Donald’s death, his sister Joyce shared more about their family. After

several phone discussions, our first interview was in December of 1997. Joyce's family knowledge continues to be helpful but limited because she was so much younger than Bob, and many family details were buried with Marion. Without Joyce's help and encouragement however, and Donald's insistence, tracing the family roots would have remained an enigma.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation begins with the premise that critical attention to the work of Bob Kaufman is long overdue, and that Bob Kaufman is a significant American poet in the African American and Beat traditions. The purpose of this dissertation begins to rectify this need with a study of Bob Kaufman's verse. My exploration of Kaufman necessitates some pointed attention to the cultural, social, and psychological influences that gave rise to his work, specifically his upbringing in the south, his travels, and the misrepresented times of his life in current biographical entries and some present scholarship. I will also address the notion of him as an oral poet within the context of the African American Oral tradition and the improvisational nature of Jazz music. I will also consider the surrealist impulse in Bob Kaufman's work. Thus, this dissertation will treat Bob Kaufman's use of the Surreal and the Jazz idiom as a social and political vehicle for his art. his practice locates him at the heart of modernism, and looks ahead to the postmodern in American Literature. In this regard, I will demonstrate how Bob Kaufman outdistances his Beat contemporaries and pre-figures the Black Arts and Cultural Movement of the 1960s not just in chronological order but in social and political content, and literary practice. My project seeks to understand Bob Kaufman's overall aesthetic by close analysis of his major themes; linguistic prowess; his often overlooked southern surreal; the collision of music and poetry in his poems; his use of rhythm and typography as structural performance. To this end, I will examine the *Solitudes* collection with attention to his emphasis on poetic shape, structure and sound, and how to read the influence of Jazz in his printed work. I discuss why literary scholarship should unearth Bob Kaufman's verse.



## Chapter 1: Introduction, Overview, Review of Literature

*Who will believe my verse in time to come. . . .*

*The age would come to say . . . .*

Sonnet #17, Shakespeare

*The gold-dust of your voice*

*& twenty-five cents*

*can buy a cup of coffee.*

*We sell pain for next to nothing! Nope,*

*you don't know me but your flesh-*

*&-blood language lingers in my head*

*like treason & raw honey.*

Yusef Komunyakaa

From "Letter to Bob Kaufman"

*Speaking for myself, the questions which interest me most when reading a poem are two. The first is technical: 'Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?' The second is, in the broadest sense, moral: 'What kind of guy inhabits this poem? What is his notion of the good life or the good place? His notion of the Evil One? What does he conceal from the reader? What does he conceal even from himself?*

W(ystan). H(ugh). Auden

*All writers arrive at a reconciliation of a sense of tradition and a sense of difference.*

Charles T. Davis

To know how to say what others only know how to think

is what makes men poets or sages; and to dare to say  
what others only dare to think makes men martyrs or  
reformers – or both.

Elizabeth Charles,

British writer (1828-1896)

A Black Beat poet born in the American South, Bob Kaufman's influence stretches to the far coasts of America, and reaches across oceans as well. His words echo a timeless spirit of man's mature musings on modern life in the mid-twentieth century U.S.A.,

appreciative and celebrating Jazz and its chief innovators, while echoing the angst and melancholy of the dispossessed. Sometimes, Bob Kaufman is hilarious, often insightful, and biting; he offers indictments of social, political, or economic ills, things everyone must sift, survive, and tackle in order to retain some sense of sanity. Bob Kaufman's poems are like ancient treasure, meant to be excavated and understood for their resonant truth. They gleam still, timeless in their revelations, haunted by the perplexities of the times in which they were written, and for all time in their myriad layers, reflecting a complex verse that reaches across cultures and literary traditions, especially both African American and Beat modes.

Renewed critical interest and increased calls for inquiry since his death speaks to the staying power of Bob Kaufman's work. Detailed interpretation of the work of Bob Kaufman, makes us reconsider the last line of his poem "Dolorous Echo," from the *Solitudes* collection, which is cited here as my title, "when I die, I won't stay dead"(30); I propose to challenge the standing perception of the poet and his poetry. Even his editor, Raymond Foye begins his "Editor's Note" to the *Ancient Rain* collection with the now famous Kaufman quote "I want to be anonymous" (ix). Let it be said now, when I met Bob Kaufman at the end of his life, I found a calm, mature poet, who was pleased he was being read and appreciated by generations following him. So as Mr. William Shakespeare asks, who will come to believe Kaufman's verse in time to come? Mr. Shakespeare, this age has come to say that like the pyramids, such is the lasting power of the poetry of Bob Kaufman.

The work of poets, their poetry, allows readers to feel the angst, the

disappointments, the humanity, the troubles, the wonders of their times. Poetry, when it is good, is honest and provides heartfelt views of the past. It is the poet's past and struggles, understanding, humor, personality. This is a poet's gift to readers; we are forever enriched by these gems, these poems that speak to us still, that unveil the mind of someone who took the time, practiced the craft, and shared poems as capsules of themselves and their time, history.

In the days before televisions were so widely owned or watched, people read more. The new work of a poet or "group" of poets, or God forgive a "movement," was real news; for this work is history interpreted by some of the best minds. Poets studied other poets, noting who wrote in spite of expectations and difficulties, and who carved new paths or tread old avenues in new ways. It is a calling or curse to articulate for one's self what turns out to be the voice of the many, perhaps the voices no one would hear unless a poet dares to speak the truth to power. Bob Kaufman, like Amiri Baraka or Sonia Sanchez or Haki Madubuti, articulated the hopes, disappointments, and possibilities of the Black Arts Movement. The Beats, poets Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, and others danced their language to a new awareness of the times. These Beats, especially Kerouac, Corso, and Ginsberg, were amazed by the Negro creativity that was embodied in Negro Jazz. At the same time, Ginsberg articulated and proclaimed his sensibilities as a Jew and gay man, in a time where few people could accept people like him in the mainstream. Bob Kaufman, like Ginsberg, who did not fit the poetic "norm" of the time.

The goal of this chapter is many-fold: 1. To briefly introduce Bob Kaufman, and the need and aim for this dissertation; 2. To present Kaufman as a poet published in

representative anthologies of both the African American and Beat traditions, thereby demonstrating my premise that he is an important poet to both literary movements, thus moving him from marginal to central; 3. To provide an overview of the critical attention Kaufman has received by Black and white critics, confirming his complexity; 4. To prepare for assumptions and approaches of subsequent chapters by introducing the points of specific inquiry, such as his modernist place, his surrealist force, and Jazz poetry.

Prior to this Dissertation, there has been no study of Bob Kaufman's poetry in the entire first collection, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*, and there are conflicting legendary accounts of his life. Through my analysis, I am attempting to follow W.H. Auden's questions that began this chapter, in order to present Bob Kaufman's technical and verbal art and to perhaps unearth the man who inhabits his poems, his notions of the good life, through what he reveals and conceals.

While Bob Kaufman is included more and more in contemporary anthologies of African American writers and Beat writers, there were periods when he was ignored and excluded under both categories. It is as though Kaufman were removed from history. Some of that came from racism and the peculiar backlash against Negroes of the McCarthy era. Author David Henderson's seminal KPFA broadcast "A Tribute to Bob Kaufman," details the particular Bob Kaufman experienced at the hands of one North Beach policeman named Biggerini, who had it in for all of the Beats (then nicknamed Beatnicks by San Francisco columnist Herb Caen). Biggerini took special pleasure in beating, harassing, and jailing Kaufman, who was the rare Negro among his white North Beach peers. Also, take into account the pushing forward of the white Beats in instances of

media exposure. Allen Ginsberg's poems were labeled obscene and banned, and thus provided a formidable media platform for attention. His fame eclipsed many of his peers. Still, Bob Kaufman's poems were included, as in the 1959 *Life* magazine spread on the essentials of a Beat pad. Among hit Jazz albums of the day was "The Abomunist Manifesto" Broadside by Kaufman, which was published by City Lights Books. Bob Kaufman's name is not listed as the author below the full-length picture of the pad's contents, but he is mentioned toward the end of the long article spread through the issue. The widely-accepted notion of Bob Kaufman as wanting to be anonymous, his Jewish last name, his run-ins with the law and incarceration off and on over the years, and the fact that unlike many poets out to "make it," Kaufman did not pursue publishers; all these factors contributed to his remaining unknown. It is no wonder that critic Barbara Christian was moved in *Black World* to ask "What ever happened to Bob Kaufman?"

Overall, only a handful of critics, Black and white, have written on the poems of Bob Kaufman, and only on those that have been included in anthologies. Certainly, the need for critical attention was first raised by Christian, who though more known for her work as a Black Feminist critic just after the hey day of the Black Arts Movement, saw a need to reclaim Bob Kaufman. She cited his innovation in poetry, his essential place among the Beats, and his potent message for post-modern avant guard poetics.

Appearing first in *Black World* in 1970, and later reprinted as part of *The Beats: Essays in Criticism* in 1981, Christian's article, titled "Whatever Happened to Bob Kaufman?" asserts that her students recognize Beat principals Ginsberg, Kerouac, even Black Jazz poet Ted Joans, but "the real movers are forgotten, their sacrifices, work

erased” (107). For Christian, “Bob Kaufman . . . is one of the poets who helped shape the beat movement in American poetry, and, as usual when somebody Black makes something new in America, he’s the one who’s apt to be forgotten” (107). In her article on Bob Kaufman, “Surreal Self-Presentation,” Kathryn V. Lindberg echoes Barbara Christian’s early disappointment in the lack of reception for Kaufman. Lindberg reaffirms that Christian “protests Kaufman’s marginalization as an exemplary case of both mainstream and Beat dismissal of black poets as innovators” and attempts to reclaim Kaufman as a founding Beat and a prodigious black poet” (*Reading Race* 164). It must also be said here that Barbara Christian was at one time married to poet David Henderson of the KPFA Tribute to Kaufman, who wrote the introduction to the posthumously-published *Cranial Guitar*. Henderson had lived on the “Lower East-Side” of New York City, and both he and Christian knew Kaufman, saw his rise on the poetry scene, and noted his disappearance. Christian’s tribute to the man and his work was certainly the critical inspiration for this study.

Barbara Christian sees Kaufman as challenging “middle-classed American values in the Fifties, when many Black and white intellectuals were yet to see the connection between the incredible blandness of American life and the destruction [which] America as a government and as a propagandist idea symbolized” (107). Christian documents Kaufman’s poetic emergence, “like Ginsberg, Joans and Kerouac. . .on the Lower East Side – the fringe of New York City. . . as a part of that outlandish, rebellious element of American life which emerged in the midst of Eisenhowerian conformity and mediocrity” (107). For Christian, Kaufman’s New York verse articulates the Lower East Side as a

land of dreamers and drunks, the flip-side of slick billboards where the real people do not conform to television images of perfection. Kaufman's attack on American values of "racism and imperialism," Christian asserts, stands up for the "American Black . . . the American poor," and the world (109). Christian highlights Bob Kaufman's attacks on Hollywood and all it represents, his reverence for "Jazz as a protest music," his existential loneliness, and his "Abomunist Manifesto" as a "blueprint for a revolutionary way of life" (110-113). Christian closes with a call "to protect such a man. . . who pointed the way to the painful visions Blacks lived through in the Sixties," to take cultural responsibility "to look to Bob Kaufman" (114). Christian echoes the need to investigate what Auden calls the poet's verbal contraptions and how they work and figure somehow into the Kaufman inhabiting these Black Beat poems.

The early imperative of Barbara Christian has been taken up by Maria Damon, who has faithfully championed Bob Kaufman's work. With Ronna C. Johnson, Damon, in "Recapturing the Skipped Beats,"<sup>2</sup> reminds readers that when we think of Beat literature, we ought to think about more than the writers often listed as principal; indeed, Beat culture and literature included people of color and women (B4). Johnson and Damon identify the marginalization of Black and women *Beats*, and argue for retrieving them. Damon and Johnson note the major Black voices of LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Ted Joans, and Kaufman, and note that Bob Kaufman is the least-known of the three. Left out of the mainstream, all three prominent Black Beat poets participated in the publishing of their work. Among the women *Beats*, invisibility was the standard, like so many women writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, but their more recent

memoirs, more than their fiction and verse, remain as testimony of their contributions to the era and to their Beat men; these memoirs also chronicle their part in the production of Beat journals and broadsides.

For all the initial conceptions of a “Beat Rebellion” of outlaws, rebels purported by media in the 50s, the “literary works, which aroused great controversy and academic disdain when first published in the fifties, are now part of the canon of American literature taught in universities around the country” (Phillips 23). In her article “Victors of Catastrophe: Beat Occlusions,” appearing in *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965*, Maria Damon employs Walter Benjamin’s method for the reconstruction of cultural history as a parallel interpretation for Beat culture, “its inclusions and exclusions” (141). In this way, Damon places the better-known Beats such as Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac within a “widely dispersed network of supporters, fellow travelers, and kindred spirits who, though less famous or entirely unknown, enabled these now prominent men to lead individually creative lives” (142). Damon reminds readers that the creative work these Beats produced documented the down-trodden and outcast, from junkies to queers, from displaced moms to Jazz musicians, and that their poetry received much of its creative energy from this combination (142). Damon gives Bob Kaufman a significant mention, because it is here within the lesser-known, the real-life anonymous artists and castaways that the genius of Bob Kaufman appears, that “his relative obscurity. . .also represents the de facto situation of racially and economically disenfranchised artists” (Damon 143).

Damon urges readers to “actively go beyond the great-minds-and-talents model that often serves as a primitive but necessary foundation for more textured inquiry (in



ethnic and women's studies. . .)" for "a broader historical perspective" (144). To aid in filling in these significant gaps in order to provide the full Beat picture, Damon then champions the roles and creative work of women Beats such as Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Carolyn Cassady, Bonnie Bremser, Jan Kerouac, and the dedicated service performed by Eileen Kaufman, Bob's wife, who "transcribed and collected Bob Kaufman's work for publication with New Directions and City Lights, a task he would never have undertaken himself, committed as he was to performing in the absolute present" (146).<sup>3</sup> For Damon, Kaufman and people of color, gays, and other outcasts are victims and victors, survivors and casualties of the fifties (147). Damon wants to ensure readers will hail Beat culture's entire "rich heritage," its full range of influences and friendships.

Although Bob Kaufman's poetry first appeared in a City Lights broadside "Abomunist Manifesto," thereby positioning him as a Beat poet, for many years, as Damon rightly suggests, he was excluded from Beat anthologies and critical debate. On the other hand, although not a household name like that of Amiri Baraka [who readers first came to admire as LeRoi Jones], Bob Kaufman's work appeared in journals and anthologies of Black writers. This is important to note because although primarily thought of as a Beat poet, Kaufman's work has been squarely placed among his contemporaries, the other Black Beat writers of the period, most notably LeRoi Jones, Ted Joans, and A.B. Spellman—then considered "Village Poets."

Critical attention by Blacks is increasing but has been consistent from the 1960s and more available since the 1970s. Black critic Eugene Redmond compared Kaufman's

form and style to writers outside of the Beat aesthetic and in the Black American Tradition but not Beat, such as Russell Atkins and K. Curtis Lyle (325). In 1968, Kaufman was not included in LeRoi Jones & Larry Neal's seminal *Black Fire, An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, but Bob Kaufman is mentioned in Part IV, in the discussion on Contemporary Literature in *Dark Symphony, Negro Literature in America*, edited by James A. Emanuel and Theodore L. Gross. The editors say Kaufman's *Solitudes* along with Melvin Tolson's *Harlem Gallery*, "both appearing in 1965, show the accumulation of modernist influences. Surrealism and cryptic historical allusions are mixed with parental sentimentality in young Kaufman . . . ." (372).

In 1969, Kaufman's poem "I, Too, Know What I Am Not" appeared in *The New Black Poetry* edited with an introduction by Clarence Major, who refers to Kaufman as "a young poet who first became identified with the Beat Generation" (150). In 1970, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps published three of Bob Kaufman's poems from his *Solitudes* collection in *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1970*. Yes, Langston Hughes was a fan of Bob Kaufman. The editors, Bontemps and Hughes, have Kaufman born in 1935 in San Francisco rather than in his home of New Orleans in 1925, but report that he "was an important part of the 'San Francisco Renaissance' of the 1950s along with Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Lawrence Ferlinghetti" (614). Also in 1970, Kaufman's work appeared in June Jordan's anthology *Soulscript, Afro-American Poetry*.

In 1973, more of Kaufman's poems were published in *The Poetry of Black America, Anthology of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* edited by Arnold Adoff with an introduction by Gwendolyn Brooks. Here among several already well-known Kaufman poems is the only

appearance of the one poem “Patriotic Ode on the Fourteenth Anniversary of the Persecution of Charlie Chaplin,” which is a brief, surrealistic Praise Song. Also, Adoff clearly asserts that “he was a leading poet during the 1950s period of that city’s literary ‘renaissance’” (528). Adoff repeats information about Kaufman’s influence “in the development of white ‘beat’ poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti,” and that “Bob Kaufman had earned great respect for his work in England and France before it became well known in this country, although he is now represented in many collections” (528). Regarding England, Adoff refers to Bob Kaufman’s second place in the Guinness Prize Competition. The first prize went to T.S. Eliot. In France, Kaufman came to be called “The Black Rimbaud.”

In 1974, Kaufman was included in Naomi Long Madgett’s *Deep Rivers: A Portfolio: 20 Contemporary Black American Poets* published by Lotus Press of Detroit. By 1976, Kaufman’s place among African American writers of the Beat era was clearly emphasized by Eugene B. Redmond in his *Drumvoices, The Mission of Afro-American Poetry, A Critical History* in 1976. Connecting Kaufman to his roots in African American literature, Redmond sees him “as a spiritual heir to Toomer,” another critical link worth pursuing. In addition, Kaufman’s work appeared in anthologies of multi-cultural literature such as Ishmael Reed’s *Califia, The California Anthology*, in 1979, and in Quincy Troupe’s *Giant Talk: Anthology of Third World Writings*, 1975. Kaufman’s poem “Ancient Rain” was published in the 1992 collection of *Black Southern Voices: An Anthology of Fiction, poetry, Drama, Non Fiction, and Critical Essays*, edited by John Oliver Killens and Jerry W. Ward, Jr. Of course, the ultimate canon codification occurred

in 1997 when, at the insistence of Barbara T. Christian, five Kaufman poems—"Walking Parker Home," "Grandfather Was Queer, Too," "Jail Poem," "Unanimity Has Been Achieved, Not a Dot Less for Its Accidentalness," and "War Memoir: Jazz, Don't Listen to It at Your Own Risk"-- appeared in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. This section was expanded in 2004 to add writers such as Harryette Mullen, Caryl Phillips, and Edwidge Danticat, but two of the Kaufman poems were eliminated.

More recent critical attention is provided by African American, T. J. Anderson, III, in a chapter, "Body and Soul: Bob Kaufman's *Golden Sardine*," in his book *Notes to Make the Sound Come Right: Four Innovators of Jazz Poetry* (2004). The son of a composer, Anderson literally reads the music in Kaufman's verse, bringing to bear his depth of musical knowledge.<sup>4</sup> *Callaloo*, a *Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters* founded in 1976 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, now published by The Johns Hopkins University Press, increased critical attention to Kaufman with their *Jazz Poetics: A Special Issue* (Damon, Edwards, Griffin editors) in the Spring 2002 issue. Also, celebrated poet Lorenzo Thomas's book *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2000) devotes attention to Bob Kaufman's central place among the Beat poets and briefly in the African American literary continuum as a direct link to the Black Arts movement. That same year, Kaufman's poems appeared in *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry: 200 Years of Struggle Power, Beauty, and Triumph from 50 Outstanding Poets*, edited with an Introduction by Michael S. Harper and Anthony Walton.

The noting of his work by critics, Black and white, and his substantial appearance

in journals and anthologies of Black Literature confirms Bob Kaufman's place, not only as a significant voice of the Beat generation, but also as an acknowledged voice of the Black American Poetic vision. In the interpretive discussions of his work that follows, Bob Kaufman will be shown to be a unique voice among his Beat contemporaries and a considerable ideological precursor to the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s.

Prior to the last decade of the twentieth century, Bob Kaufman's work was excluded from the critical attention to the Beat pantheon, as though he was invisible. Critics who have consistently drawn attention to the work of Bob Kaufman are Maria Damon, Alden Neilsen, and Katheryne Lindberg. Damon's *The Dark End of the Street* appeared early in 1993. It codifies Bob Kaufman as an essential Beat poet who suffered "uncanonization" as well as marginalization, but notes his alienation as partly due to his shamanesque nature and partially to racial exclusion. Maria Damon revisits this exclusion of Bob Kaufman in subsequent articles, most notably in "Victors of Catastrophes: Beat Occlusions" in The Whitney Museum of American Art's book *Beat Culture and the New America 1959-1965*, edited by Lisa Phillips. Damon compares the silencing of Kaufman with that of the silenced women Beat poets such as Diane DiPrima, Joanna Kyger, and other sister Beats who made families but also accomplished Beat aesthetics. Alden Nielsen's *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (1997) considers Kaufman; and in *Reading Race in American Poetry: An Area of Act* (2000), a chapter by Katheryne V. Lindberg argues for Kaufman's inclusion as a major Beat poet, mentions his surreal bent, and sees him as an important poet in the African American tradition as well. Then more recently, there is *Integral Music: Languages of African American Innovation*

(2004); here, Nielsen revisits Bob Kaufman as a postwar poet and addresses his attention to the influence of Lorca and red-light bandit Caryl Chessman. Ann Chatters includes Kaufman in her more recent Beat anthology; Amiri Baraka is there too, but Black Beat poet Ted Joans is not included, which proves the quirky quality of Beat scholarship.

While critics' and scholars' interest in Bob Kaufman's work is made apparent by articles addressing him as a Jazz poet or Beat poet, this dissertation is a study of the verse of Bob Kaufman, and enters those discussions to add to an overdue debate.

From his emergence as a voice of the Beat aesthetic in the 1950s, Bob Kaufman took center stage as a poet and a dynamic performing reader in literary circles. His poems, nationally published first as broadsides by City Lights Press in 1959, bore kinship to the new Jazz scene, the hip cats of mid-century America, the surreal visionaries of the modern world, prior American masters such as Walt Whitman and Hart Crane, and to international literary giants such as Garcia Lorca and Rimbaud. Bob Kaufman, though, was a working Black man, a former Merchant seaman, a union organizer, a son, a husband, and a father, who was writing in an effort to defy expectations of middle class complacency. His first audiences were in the low-lighted night clubs of New York. He then performed in Texas, then the Fillmore district in San Francisco, later again in New York's Greenwich Village and finally he returned to San Francisco's North Beach. Originally, these audiences thought him more akin to the Beat aesthetic than to African American literary traditions.

If Bob Kaufman is a Beat poet and a Jazz poet, in what ways is he both? What is a Jazz poet, according to Bob Kaufman? Where specifically is Kaufman embedded in the African American literary tradition and aesthetics? Did he create on the spot, orally? If he

did, is he part of the oral tradition? Are all the legends about him true? He was supposedly at sea for twenty years and was shipwrecked. Where? When? Why? Was his grandmother a slave from Martinique? Why the German Jew bit if he was Black? Did he worship as a Jew? These are some of the questions surrounding Bob Kaufman's work and his life. It is time to begin to examine the breadth of his work and to uncover some of the obscure claims made about him. This work will continue the work of the critics I mentioned, and attempt to advance our reading of the poems and the poet Bob Kaufman. The chief challenge, for this inquiry then, is, as W. H. Auden suggests, two-fold, technical and humane. How do Kaufman's poems work?

To answer William Shakespeare, this age, still in awe of the literature created by Bob Kaufman, believes in Kaufman's verse, and the time has come to say what we know about this man and his work, since his originality has proved of continuing importance in many lives.

No matter how scarce the scholarship on Bob Kaufman, no matter how fleeting specific details of his whereabouts, his life, no matter how many legends pile up around his work and life, he remains at the heart of a devoted following, and finally is gaining long-overdue inclusion in the American literary canon. However obscure in life, it is the unifying belief of Kaufman proponents that his achievement in literature possesses authority in its anger and insight, its nonconformist and anti-materialist credo; it also provides pleasure with its surrealistic humor, its jazzy aesthetic, and its lyrical lines. Kaufman's work broke meaningful ground for the Beats, providing a haunting statement of the isolation of modern man in such works as "Second April," and his "Abomunist

Manifesto,” a potent Beat text. The central Beat ideas are all in his work: the attention to nothingness, his radical criticisms of the American standard of exclusion; his veneration of Jazz, Jazz musicians, and Black culture.

Bob Kaufman’s work is also an important forerunner of the Black Arts Movement (BAM), not for its obvious chronological placement, but because of his early thoughtful attention to the struggle for social and political justice; his interest and appreciation of Jazz music; his use of the Praise Song form and content linked to a Black heritage; and his concern for the bewildering place of modern man.

This study aspires to reveal the breadth of Bob Kaufman’s poetry production, pointing out its unique attributes, while enlightening readers regarding relevant details of his life beyond the myths and legends engendered on his behalf, some of which were self-propelled. Let it be articulated at the outset, that as Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy said, trying to describe the Taj Mahal, “all the adjectives will be inadequate” in portraying Bob Kaufman and his work. He wrote in the diction of a Black Beat artist integrating the American segregated literary scene of the 1950s, and a Black writer embracing his culture in the 60s and beyond. His work speaks to humanity from the loneliness of an individual urging awareness and pushing for change in the face of the so-called promise of America.

Bob Kaufman’s cultural, intellectual, historical life in the Beat years is uncovered through close readings of his verse, and empirical investigations reveal the truth about his parentage and early life. These biographical details place Bob Kaufman strategically into the cultural and intellectual context of his birthplace and early upbringing, as well as his years at sea, debunking and re-enforcing some legends surrounding this Black Beat icon.



Subsequently, Kaufman is established inside a broader artistic, cultural, and social landscape, thereby indicating the forces at work on him as an individual and the communities in which he emerges as artist, writer, performer. His is the story of Bebop and Jazz, poverty among plenty, private and public jails, a fascinating story with broad implications; Kaufman's work is proof of the extent of the relation of poetry to music during the mid-twentieth century, a period that produced both a Beat and Black aesthetic. His work, as a result, is firmly embedded in the American poetic tradition. He is an American poet, who like Walt Whitman, was ahead of his time.<sup>5</sup> Kaufman, as Dizzy Gillespie often mentioned in characterizing Charlie Parker, "played the notes folks heard but for which they had no expression." Like Bird, Kaufman's originality is his hallmark.

There is no Kaufman biography or autobiography, and there are no writer's notebooks to peruse. In this regard, my inquiry into his life and work is primarily historically descriptive, critically interpretive, and culturally investigative. Overall, this discussion is descriptive--that is, exploring phonetic and semantic units; interpretive--concerning relevant themes and hermeneutics; and cultural and performative--inquiring how the work operates within cultural interests and how it is informed by the social and historical sphere that gave rise to it. A close reading of the work of Bob Kaufman requires an analysis of key relevant terms such as orality; Jazz poetry; modernism; surrealism; and how all these terms apply to his poems. The questions of whether Bob Kaufman is an oral poet, that is, whether he composed orally rather than in writing; did he improvise in the manner of Jazz musicians; in what manner he is a Jazz poet; questions are answered in the second part of Chapter II, the biographical

chapter under “Man as Poet.” Finally, it is difficult to discuss Kaufman’s place in American letters without referring to the notions of modernism and post-modernism. As a result, these terms are defined so that their usage is understood within this larger discussion.

Bob Kaufman emerged as a poet in the post World War II years. Like Bebop Jazz, he erupted on to the scene in the forties. His mature work spans a period from the 50s through the mid 80s. During his life, he produced three volumes of verse: *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (New York: New Directions, 1965); *Golden Sardine*, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1967); and *The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956 - 1978* (New York: New Directions, 1981). While these collections solidified Bob Kaufman’s standing in literary circles, it was City Lights Books’ publication of his broadsides that really launched him on both coasts. Both poems, *Abomunist Manifesto* and *Second April*, appeared in 1959; and a fiction *Does the Secret Mind Whisper?* was published in 1960. As testimony to Kaufman’s national influence, he was discussed in *Life Magazine*’s November 1959 issue on the Beats; his *Abomunist Manifesto* broadside is located in the photo essay as an essential element of a Beat pad. During the proliferation of the many beat journals, in 1959, the combined efforts of Bob Kaufman, Allen Ginsberg, William Margolis, and John Kelly led to the co-founding of the multi-cultural journal *Beatitude*. According to Warren French, in *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance*, “it was the only cooperative project of the prominent beats” (49-54). The fact that these four men co-founded *Beatitude* was confirmed by Allen Ginsberg at the New York University Beat Conference early in the last decade of the twentieth century. By the spring of 1961,

“Kaufman was nominated for England’s coveted Guinness Poetry Award, but T. S. Eliot won” (Winans 276). It was Kaufman’s poem “Bagel Shop Jazz,” that was nominated for the Guinness (Page 150). According to some reports, Kaufman was the second runner up for the Guinness. For years, after his death, poet and novelist Trey Ellis’s DarkRoom Collective held annual Bob Kaufman Memorial Readings. Resurgent interest in Kaufman’s work led to the publication of *Cranial Guitar, Selected Poems* by Coffee House Press in 1996. This book combines selections from all of his books and six poems written<sup>6</sup> before he died.

Michael Davidson’s *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (1991) gives Bob Kaufman only a brief mention, and his wife is also mentioned briefly in a discussion of women linked with the Beats. A second study, by Warren French, simply called *The San Francisco Poetry Renaissance 1955-1960* (1991) is one of the few early works on the Beats in general that devotes specific attention to Bob Kaufman and places him among his contemporaries as “far more militant than most of the beats” (68). The recent resurgence of interest in the Beats is evidenced by the growth of Ginsberg’s Naropa Institute, the annual Kerouac Conference in Lowell, Massachusetts, the Conference on the Beats at New York University in 1994, and the large exhibit on the Beats by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1995. Kaufman’s place among the Beats and African American letters was firmly established in the Whitney exhibit’s catalogue *Beat Culture and the New America, 1950-1965* (1995) edited by Lisa Phillips. In *Beat Culture and the New America*, Maria Damon chronicles Beat “exclusionary practices” and points to additional contributors of the Beat aesthetic and

literature such as Bob Kaufman and other writers, mostly women, including Kaufman's wife, Eileen, who were largely ignored by Beat critics until the last decade. Bob Kaufman's work was mentioned in the October 1, 1999 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in an article entitled "Recapturing the Skipped Beats," where Ronna C. Johnson and Maria Damon note that "independent Justin Desmangles of Seattle is currently working on a Kaufman biography" (B6).

The scholarship and publication history I have traced show two things. 1. During his "period of silence,"<sup>7</sup> those years after 1963, after President Kennedy died, it seemed as though Bob Kaufman had fallen off the face of the earth in Beat anthologies, and his work was not included in criticism of the Beats. Many people thought him dead. 2. Bob Kaufman appeared and reappeared in many important anthologies of African American literature during the 60s and 70s, and thus was clearly claimed as part of the Black literary tradition and as an acknowledged "Beat."

This was not the case outside African American literary studies. Even though Bob Kaufman won a National Endowment Fellowship after the publication of *Ancient Rain* (1981), which certainly caused a resurgence of interest in his work in the Bay area, it was not until the New York University Conference on the Beats (1994) and the Whitney Museum Exhibit on Beat Culture and the New America (1995) that Bob Kaufman began to reappear in anthologies of the Beats. It is clear today that Bob Kaufman is claimed by both the African American and the Beat literary traditions, placing him squarely and literally central to the American poetic landscape of the mid-twentieth century.

Accordingly, attention must be paid to definitions and terms appropriate to placing

the poems in perspective. Specifically, Part I of Chapter 2 will address the Man as Poet, where such terms as Modernism, Surrealism, the African American Oral Tradition and Oral Performance, and Jazz Poetry will be defined. I will investigate the cultural, social, and vernacular imprint of the Negro of the 1950s, continuing a tradition made popular by Langston Hughes, and strengthened by Ted Joans and Amiri Baraka. I contend that while Bob Kaufman possessed special abilities which enabled him to compose orally, he was not technically an oral poet. In addition, I urge that his approach to Jazz poetry combines the African American Praise Song, and attempts to capture the experience of music in verse. In Part II of Chapter 2, the Man as Poet, I will address the life of Bob Kaufman the man, his unique upbringing in New Orleans, his family culture, and the myths surrounding him, correcting some biographical errors and suggesting areas in need of study.

In Chapter Three, I will address the most significant poems in the first collection, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*, classifying and interpreting the shorter poems, then addressing the longer poems. Also, Bob Kaufman's collections of poems will be analyzed for their thematic attention, poetic forms, classification, shape, structure, and sound, what Yusef Komunyakaa calls "blood language lingering" in our heads (*Neon Vernacular* 73). In Kaufman's verse, the influence of Jazz and his depiction of it will be compared to similar work by his African American contemporaries Baraka, Hughes, and others. In addition, his lyrics will be investigated for the complex melancholy depicted, what Komunyakaa calls the "pain" sold "for next to nothing," in language lingering "like treason and raw honey" (*Neon Vernacular* 73). I note his treatment of the south, demonstrating how he incorporates biographical details into a surreal poetic, and how and

where he treats his Black identity which is clearly influenced by the forces of culture, tradition, and history as well as the embracing of his roots. The longer poems will be addressed with particular attention to the lexicon of Bob Kaufman in “Abomunist Manifesto.” In Chapter Four, his short story “Hawk Lawler Chorus,” is interpreted as a Jazz poem in prose. In Chapter Five, I will conclude addressing his work overall, pointing to areas of work yet to pursue.

Some significant studies on the Beats include a chronology of leading events in the lives of the Beats, but exclude the Black Beats,--Kaufman, Jones, Baraka--so I have established a Black Beat Chronology in Appendix A focusing on Bob Kaufman’s contributions. Perhaps, this information will enable a more complete picture of the Beat era. In Appendix B, I provide a letter from Lynne Wildey.

## Chapter 2: Part I: Man as Poet, Methods

*Nusi Le wònume La, towoe.*  
*What you have in your mouth is yours.*  
Ewe Proverb

*...By an attention to the language of black America and its literary works of art. . . .what is ultimately involved, however, is the entire history—the full discourse—that constitutes black American culture (159).*  
Houston Baker, Jr., *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*

*THE NEGLECTED and sometimes viciously suppressed real history of our various forms of art before and since January 1, 1863, is a magnificent tragedy. . . (12).*  
Clarence Major, *The New Black Poetry*

**Most-Def (initions).** In his 1976 seminal critical work *Drumvoices*, Eugene Redmond writes “Kaufman’s poetry, conveying protest through understatement and irony, is marked by unusual and surreal images” (324). It is here, just after the modernist movement in poetry, where surrealism meets both protest understatement and Jazz, and it is at that crossroads that readers must reckon with the complex work of Bob Kaufman. As a result, any meaningful discussion of Bob Kaufman’s work must establish terms and definitions, particularly for modernism, surrealism, and Jazz poetry. The title of this chapter borrows license from the current hip-hop lingo. Hip Hop is a type of music, a language usage, and a culture. Mos is short for most, and def is short for definition, sometimes, other times for something good. In Hip-Hop, yes, Mos Def is the stage name

of the Brooklyn-born rapper and actor, Dante Bez (“Mos Def”). For my purpose here, I am concerned with “def” as the standard of excellence or something that is really good or definitive (“Def”).

Why a Hip-Hop reference with Kaufman? There are some obvious parallels. Like the Beat generation, the Hip-Hop generation challenges the status quo, and its appeal crosses race. This Hip-Hop generation is, also as Eugene Redmond calls them, “irreverent” (324). The Beats appropriated their hip lingo from Jazz musicians and were considered the rebels of their day. They dressed differently, spoke differently, and rebelled against the status quo. The Hip-Hop generation dresses and speaks differently, and are also rebels. The greatest difference is that Hip-Hop dress, the lowered, belt-less pants styles and over-sized shirts are borrowed from prison wear, and the Hip-Hop generation’s rebelliousness is expressed mainly in the words, which are sometimes in direct opposition to sappy Rhythm and Blues love lyrics. Hip Hop focuses on social status; artists often demean each other and the opposite sex. Most importantly, whole segments of the lyrical content of Hip-Hop music is political; Hip Hop artists use language to push current ways of looking at the system and each other. Like good Beat poetry, good Hip Hop makes people think. This license I take then in comparing these periods is no far stretch, as Kaufman would appreciate the rebelliousness of the current generation.

The claim here places Bob Kaufman in the Modern school, showing how he is Surrealist, defining him as a Jazz poet, dismissing the notion that he is an “oral poet,” and finally, unearthing a special gift he possesses, that of eidetic memory, which may explain why he is often mistakenly referred to as oral.



For most of his adult life, Bob Kaufman epitomized the romantic notion of poet, idealist, and bohemian. Achieving upward success in life or in a standard life—wife, home, kids, car-- is always difficult for a poet, and that many poets rarely achieve “fame” or wide-spread success is common. Tie the challenge of a poet’s life to that of a Negro in the 1950s, especially one who is attracted to the bohemian or outsider lifestyle, and we get a greater sense of where Kaufman as a Black Beat existed. To be Beat, Black, and Poet equals a “marginal” man. In introducing the “Epilogue” to Richard Wright’s *Invisible Man*, Frederick J. Hoffman writes that

The Negro is a special type of marginal man. The victim of racial exclusions, he cultivates his own strategies, whether to join the whites or to live independently of them. In the fifties the Negro became a part of the Beat scene. Among other things, Normal Mailer’s “The White Negro” pointed up the Negro’s way of marginal life as a model of skillful adaption to “exile,” and advised the white radical to assume his ways. (127)

This state of being marginal, by race, by culture—Black and Beat, and by being a poet, multiplies the state of existence for the Black Beats. The forces at work on them and from within them engendered a “skillful adaption” to the times, the results of which are bodies of work still read today for this cultural, literary, and social interest.

Bob Kaufman, Amiri Baraka, and Ted Joans, envisioned and lived in the integrated artistic communities of America; with their Blackness as their foundation, they sought to express and live their freedoms, express their creativity, and create art on their own terms. While these Black Beats shared such marginalized lives, cultural and social influences as well as literary influences of their day, Bob Kaufman’s work made a unique mark in literature. Kaufman’s poetry synthesizes the influences and poetics of Whitman,

Jazz, Blues, Pound, Eliot, Lorca, Crane, Eastern Zen, the American political, social, and economic climate with the haunting of southern history, his history, his new world being which was an amalgamation of Black Catholic Creole and German Jewish roots. Kaufman absorbed these influences and recognized his emergence as American. Yet, Kaufman's verse is difficult to categorize. As Arna Bontemps writes,

The poetry of the Negro is hard to pin down. Like his music, from spirituals and gospel songs to blues, jazz and be-bop, it is likely to be marked by a certain special riff, an extra glide, a kick where none is expected and a beat for which there is no notation. It follows the literary traditions of the language it uses, but it does not hold them sacred (82).

For Bontemps then, the uniqueness of and difficulty in classifying Black poetry led some critics to put Black poetry "outside the main body of American poetry" (82). Bob Kaufman's poetry like Amiri Baraka's, and Ted Joans's, is highly original, at once American, and squarely within the Beat as well as Black aesthetic.

Kaufman's genius is complex for many reasons. His poetics emerged after World War II, evolving with the modern Black and Beat literature in the middle of the twentieth century. His fresh methodology combined oral performance with literary production. Like Baraka, and Joans, Kaufman merged the dominant culture with his own, dismissed whatever social pathology did not serve his art, and produced Black and Beat poems wholly representative of his times.

**Modernism.** In literature, we know that the term "modern" means much more than what is chronological or current, and we use it in reference to the narrower goal of describing a set of characteristics, though fluid, which are identifiable. In *The Handbook to Literature*, the eighth edition, the Modernist Period is neatly defined as the era between

1914 and 1965 (Harmon and Holman 597). Surely, however, the modernist ideal evolved as early as the industrial revolution in reaction to its challenges. Some key early proto-modernist works are Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1848); Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) and Friedrich Nietzsche in *Human, All too Human* (1878). In poetry, we must include Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Also in the modernist vein must be Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and W.E.B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903). From the change in labor as a result of steam engines to redefining the origin of man, to examining the nature of man from his dreams to the problem of race, this modernist thing is so diverse that it is contradictory. It is not a precise or convenient time frame, for it spans more than one period. Still, we must agree on some concerns we consider modern. Harmon and Holman define the term broadly as

writing marked by a strong and conscious break with tradition. It employs a distinctive kind of imagination that insists on having its general frame of reference within itself. It thus practices the solipsism of which Allen Tate accused the modern mind: it believes that we create the world in the act of perceiving it. Modern implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, loss, and despair. It rejects not only history but also the society of whose fabrication history is a record. It rejects traditional values and assumptions, and it rejects equally the rhetoric by which they were sanctioned and communicated. . . . (326)

Within this break with tradition, where original imagination is a core reference for itself, where history is no longer linear or chronological, where man is alone, lost, apart yet part of heritage, and tradition may be directly challenged, dismissed, and new semantics are required to communicate, this is where we meet this notion of the modernist ideal.

The movement of man from rural areas to urban living brought necessary internal

as well as external shifts in society. The individual became an economic entity in ways not previously perceived. These new masses of people were required to adapt in all ways. German sociologist and philosopher, Georg Simmel, expressed this tension clearly. He wrote that “The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life” (Simmel 51). It is as though to accept this new life, what was previously practiced must be rejected to carry on in this complex arena called the modern.

On the other hand, Daniel Joseph Singal warns against easy comparisons between the word “modern” and the term “Modernist.” Singal writes that “despite the etymological similarity, Modernism and modernization must be sharply differentiated; nor should ‘modern’ and ‘Modernist’ ever be treated as synonyms” (8). He asserts that historians “have increasingly come to agree that sometime around the turn of the century the intelligentsia in Europe and America began to experience a profound shift in sensibility that would lead to an explosion of creativity in the arts, transform moral values, and in time reshape the conduct of life throughout Western society” (7). Singal further quotes Peter Gay’s definition of Modernism.

Modernism, Peter Gay reports, “utterly changed painting, sculpture, and music; the dance, the novel, and the drama; architecture, poetry, and thought. And its ventures into unknown territory percolated from the rarefied regions of high culture to general ways of thinking, feeling, and seeing.” (Singal 7)

For Singal and Gay, then, Modernist thought is more than a break with tradition; it is restoration of order in human experience under the new and sometimes “chaotic

conditions of twentieth-century existence” (Singal 8). Singal further warns that

Modernism was

Not just the plaything of the avant-garde, it has assumed a commanding position in literature, music, painting, architecture, philosophy, and virtually every other realm of artistic or intellectual endeavor . . . . Modernism deserves to be treated as a full-fledged historical culture much like Victorianism, or the Enlightenment, and that it supplies nothing less than the basic contours of our current mode of thought. (8)

To Singal, Modernism is a reaction to the previous age of Victorianism, and a means to “to integrate once more the human and the animal the civilized, and savage, and to heal the sharp division that the nineteenth century had established in areas such as class, race, and gender” (12). Modernist thought is about recovery, integrating experience and being (Singal 12-13).

In his book *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, Lorenzo Thomas addresses the complex notion of modernism as including “the emergence of communications increasingly dependent upon electricity . . . [which] separated the culture of this century from that of earlier eras. But what was perceived as technological progress necessarily provoked a crisis of social and personal values, a sense that the gulf between this age and the past, while welcome, demanded a bridge” (6). This push and pull from the outside to inside, from the past to the present was further made “problematic by race as well as by class issues and by aesthetic theory” according to Thomas (6). Thus the authority of the nineteenth century, the old literary and social order, the place of all people posed a complex struggle that was further multiplied by race, class, and aesthetics.

Like Langston Hughes and other African American writers before him, Black Beat writer Bob Kaufman entered the literary scene informed by the literary history and traditions considered mainstream, but he breaks from them. For Lorenzo Thomas, this is problematic since Kaufman and others then “join in a discourse that . . . has usually ignored their presence on the scene” (4). Thomas posits Kaufman as modernist for this. Aldon Lynn Nielson places Kaufman as modernist since he is representative of those Black writers of the mid-twentieth century who were “innovative poets whose formal accomplishments were a break from the conventions of their predecessors but whose breaks with convention must be read in the dynamic context of the writing that preceded theirs”<sup>8</sup> (*Black Chant* 43).

From the early to the mid-twentieth century, American poets of every race broke important literary ground, not just in their rejection of earlier traditional poetics but in their practices and presentations. Poets took poetry out of the decorous salon to the people, out of libraries to community poetry readings, out of bookstores into Jazz clubs. Bob Kaufman was part of that Beat imperative to shout poetry in the streets. Certainly, these experimental aspects are all modernist characteristics.

The term modernism, then, utilized in this reading of the work of Bob Kaufman, is “more evaluative than descriptive,” and refers to “experimental, avant-garde” writing that “breaks from established orthodoxies, a celebration of the present, and an experimental investigation into the future” (Mahaffey 514).

**Surrealism.** Just as the modernist idea is one that rejects the past literary traditions, originating in France, Surrealism blossomed as a movement in art and literature

expressing this new tension. Surrealist art and writing was marked by a powerful and deliberate break with tradition. It employed the imagination of mankind in forms never before expressed. Spearheaded by André Breton, its chief ideals were stated in his *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924). Some scholars suggest that Surrealism developed out of the Dada<sup>9</sup>; but like modernism, its roots can be traced earlier to earlier writers such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Further, “it demonstrates the marked influence of Freud” (Harmon and Holman 504). Like the modernist ideal, in Surrealism, the power of the imagination and the power of the subconscious to bring all things imagined forward became the general frame of reference within itself. Allen Tate suggested that Surrealists were able to create the world in the act of perceiving it. Within the Surrealist tendency was historical discontinuity, alienation, loss, despair, but also humor. Rejecting history, society, linear thinking, traditional values and assumptions, Surrealism turned art and literature on its head. In art, Salvador Dali, Joan Miró, Marcel Duchamp, René Magritte, and Max Ernst (Harmon and Holman 504) were at the forefront of experimenters. On the literary scene, “literary Surrealism finally reached the United States after the Second World War and became an important feature in the work of Robert Lowell and many younger poets: Philip Lamantia, John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, Michael Benedikt, Robert Bly, James Wright, James Tate, Bill Knott, Kathleen Norris, Charles Simic, and others” (Harmon and Holman 504).

Surrealism for André Breton is not merely the automatic reaction to life or the wild expression of madness in Dada. Surrealism for Breton rejected conformity and searched for truth from the depths of the mind, suggesting an argument below the surface of

perception, an argument informed by dreams as well as reason from the deeper recesses of memory, “not the memory of the dream or sequence of dreams but the dream” itself (10-11). Breton further hailed the spontaneity inherent in the Surreal, a kind of living in the now, and suggested that all import is in the awareness “of dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality” (14). This awareness of contradiction is at the heart of surreality. Breton explains this contradictory nature.

Man proposes and disposes. He and he alone can determine whether he is completely master of himself, that is, whether he maintains the body of his desires, daily more formidable, in a state of anarchy. Poetry teaches him to. It bears within itself the perfect compensation for the miseries we endure. It can also be an organizer, if ever, as the result of a less intimate disappointment, we contemplate taking it seriously. . . . There will be gatherings on the public squares, and *movements* you never dared hope participate in. Farewell to absurd choices, the dreams of dark abyss, rivalries, the prolonged patience, the flight of the seasons, the artificial order of ideas the ramp of danger, time for everything! May you take the trouble to *practice* poetry. (18)

For Breton then, poetry can recreate reality by perception which ultimately is a larger truth, and this is possible by man’s “state of mind” (20), not by history, not by what is told or expected. This surreality is made possible by the poetic “dialogue. Here two thoughts confront each other; while one is being delivered, the other is busy with it . . . . There is no conversation in which the trace of this disorder does not occur . . . . Poetic Surrealism. . .has focused its efforts up to this point on reestablishing dialogue in its absolute truth, by freeing both interlocutors from any obligations of politeness” (34-35). Breton’s surrealist dialogue opened poetry not just to a rejection of the literary status quo, but to a more pressing dialogue of real concerns such as political oppression, and allowed poets to claim



the courage to pursue truth where they found it.

Anna Balakian explains that surrealists appreciated German thought, that Breton

despite his great antipathy for Hitler's regime, . . . the surrealists' confidence in German thought had not been shaken, . . . they considered it the most pertinent to contemporary civilization, and . . . they had faith in the uninterrupted cultural lineage proceeding from Hegel to Engels. He [Breton] stated that the surrealists considered themselves recipients of that heritage, which in their opinion should not be called German but European; and in defining their position toward German philosophy Breton made the subtle distinction of calling it not "German philosophy," but "in the German language." (134)

Balakian asserts that Breton, "In his second manifesto declared that the Hegelian concept of the penetration of the exterior world into the subjective existence had remained uncontested" (135). Balakian explains that Hegel's influence "was most felt as the surrealists realized that they were concerned with the long-range problem of knowledge as well as the immediate one of expression" (135). Balakian's inquiry into the surrealist mind reveals not just a "return from purely abstract thinking to a need for understanding of the concrete was what another surrealist, René Crevel, called the possibility of man's acting upon his universe" (136). In this way, Balakian teaches us that Surrealism is not just the popularly perceived flights of fancy, but a sincere intellectual pursuit, not only fathered by Freud but by the aesthetics of Hegel. The surrealists, using Hegel as guide, rejected the facile adoration of nature expressed by the Romantic poets. Balakian testifies to the Hegelian heritage of the surrealists.

Hegel's imprint can also be noted in the philosophical significance attributed by the surrealists to the creation of the metaphor. For them it is not a mere form of speech but the crystallization of concept. The power of their thinking, the profoundness of their emotional experience is judged by the originality and density of the metaphor. Even as Hegel had deemed the genius of metaphorical diction to be a test of the potency of the mind and a

rejection of simple reality, the successful metaphor becomes in surrealist writing, as we shall see, the measure not merely of literary satisfaction but of a victory over ordinary existence. (Balakian 137).

Like Breton, for Hegel, poetry was a special “priesthood and the epitome of human creativeness” (Balakian 137). This is the intellectual and literary legacy of surrealism as evidenced in the poetry of Bob Kaufman. His metaphors are dense, revealing a “keener comprehension” of his awareness (Balakian 137). Thus, in referring to Surrealism in the work of Bob Kaufman, I mean the kind of dialogue informed by the Hegelian aesthetic, a creative approach to reality which André Breton demands of poetry, a juxtaposing of elements toward the revelation of truth, a mindful recreation of existence as understood on a plane that interprets what is real not in a simple or straightforward manner.

**Jazz Poetry.** For purists of Jazz or Poetry, this idea of Jazz Poetry is a conundrum. Today, Jazz, after all, is a classical American musical art form in its own right. On the other hand, conservative verse fans cringe at any hint of performance poetry, especially when some pretty bad performance poetry exists and somehow gets support. Poetry studies by Maria Damon, Lorenzo Thomas, Sasha Feinstein, Alden Nielsen, and others document Jazz Poetry phenomenon and bring it to the forefront of debate. It is well known that since the Jazz Age, poets have been attached to combining Jazz and Poetry, nowhere more noticeably than in the Beat poets of the 50s. If Jazz is the official and unofficial muse for Beat writers, then what is Jazz Poetry, and what makes one a Jazz Poet? Is it what Stephen Henderson’s paradigm of what makes a Black Poet, where mentioning the titles of Jazz songs or Jazz musicians make one a Jazz Poet? Can a poet really Jazz verse?

Bob Kaufman is at the heart of this discussion. He was reading to standing-room only crowds in San Francisco before the famed Allen Ginsberg Gallery Six reading in 1956, which is noted as the significant benchmark of the beginning of the Beat Movement. Kaufman's poems are infused with direct mention of Jazz songs and musicians. Does this make him a Jazz Poet?

In their seminal book *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*, Sascha Feinstein and Yusef Komunyakaa present hundreds of poems that respond to jazz aesthetically, culturally, and musically. The poems date from the turn of the twentieth century to the final decade, the 90s; the poets included whose range mostly hail from the United States, but also from across the world. All serve to represent "jazz as poetic inspiration" (Feinstein and Komunyakaa xvii). This representative collection is a testimony to the long and acknowledged debt of poets to music and music makers, especially to jazz. As Fahamisha Patricia Brown asserts in her book *Performing the Word: African American Poetry as Vernacular Culture* (1999), Jazz poets form a "chorus of those who incorporate musical references, allusions, subjects, and themes in their poems" (125, n.6).

Feinstein reminds us in his companion to the anthology, *Jazz Poetry from the 1920s to the Present* (Praeger 1997), that scholars continue to debate the question of what is Jazz and what is poetry; he asks, does a Jazz poem have to be about Jazz or just suggest its rhythmic structure? For him and Davis Jauss, Jazz poetry is modern poetry (Feinstein 2, 3). In a simple yet strong statement, Feinstein reports Etheridge Knight's suggestion that "we should perhaps pay closer attention to the distinction made [on the flyer for *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*] to the poems as being jazz-related" (Feinstein 2). Further,

Feinstein offers a brief definition.

A jazz poem is any poem that has been informed by jazz music. The influence can be in the subject of the poem or in the rhythms, but one should not necessarily exclude the other. (Feinstein 2)

Perhaps the most precise encapsulation of what is a Jazz poet is was wonderfully and profoundly articulated by Ethridge Knight in his Haiku.

Making jazz swing in  
Seventeen syllables AIN'T  
No square poet's job.  
(*Poems from Prison*)

It must be said here that ground breakers in jazz poetry were both Black and white, and they were writing before the Beats. In the 1920s, popular poets Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay broke significant ground. The most notable African American Jazz poet was Langston Hughes, who was followed in popularity and notoriety by the work of Sterling Brown, Melvin B. Tolson [*Harlem Gallery*] and others. Hughes' jazz poems that appeared in 1922 under the title *The Weary Blues*, articulate Jazz as an essential cultural expression; by contrast, Lindsay fought the moniker of jazz poet, insisting that "he used the word [jazz] once or twice when it meant spice" (Feinstein 42). While early American poets may have pioneered Jazz poetry, the Beats brought their love of Jazz, Black speech, and the culture and aesthetics of both into Jazz poetry, marking a mushrooming into popular culture. Just as Charlie Parker or Bird and the new Jazz exploded on the scene, Jazz poetry did also. Enter Bob Kaufman.

Maria Damon and Ronna C. Johnson remind us that what we speak of as Beat literature includes people of color and women (B4). They demonstrate that, LeRoi Jones

(Amiri Baraka), Ted Joans, and Bob Kaufman, lesser known Beats, are central to the vigor and vitality of the movement (B4) and to Jazz poetry. These three, left out of the mainstream Beat discussions for years, performed to Jazz music, and their verse, fiction, essays, and memoirs remain as a testimony of their contributions to the era (B4), in addition to their part in the production of Beat journals and broadsides.

Bob Kaufman is an undisputed jazz poet and catalyst of the Beats of his day for many reasons, from his surrealistic humor to his linguistic prowess. The poems of Bob Kaufman include some delightful uses of Jazz in order to reject the status quo; Jazz, invents and reinvents itself, much like Kaufman himself did.

When the term Jazz enters the poetic mix, it becomes the end all be all of a broad range of music. Jazz music encompasses a variety of styles of music, including Ragtime, Blues, Dixieland, Swing, BeBop, Cool, Third Stream, Free Jazz, Funky, Jazz Rock, East Coast versus West, and other styles. Prior to a discussion of Bob Kaufman's use of Jazz as trope, it is necessary, however briefly, to point out some specific uses here, and to revisit the complex music most have come to know as Jazz; for the Jazz of Bob Kaufman's era offered a pointed moment as it encompassed the Blues, and especially, the avant guard BeBop of the day. Like those other forms of Jazz, BeBop emerged, burst, and left its lasting emblem on all Jazz to follow. For Bob Kaufman,

Music is a sound; music is a feeling. But in order to create the sound, the musician first has to possess the feeling. To project the feeling. Then he can create the sound. Afterwards, many musicians can make the sound, that he created, that he wrote down or composed. But first the artist, the composer, creative wise, has to possess the feeling. In modern Jazz, Charlie Parker had the feeling. He translated a feeling into a sound. Now, many others play it. It was his feeling which projected it. As art, as creative art. (Seymour interview 4)

Bill Kirchner opens his Introduction to *The Oxford Companion to Jazz* with these words of author and cultural historian Gerald Early.

I think there are only three things that America will be known for two thousand years from now; the Constitution, jazz music, and baseball, the three most beautifully designed things this country ever produced. (3)

This highly original and beautiful art form that is Jazz causes, and will continue to cause, numerous debates over how to explain, define, and categorize it. The power of Jazz music inspired the entire body of poetry we add to the name of Jazz poetry. The story of Jazz, like the story of Bob Kaufman, begins in New Orleans. And who better to tell it than a giant from the royalty of Jazz music, Duke Ellington, who expresses some regret that he did not complete a history of Jazz but tells of the birth of the Jazz moment (13).

. . .the first scene was to take place in New Orleans, with a boat coming down the canal and the King of the Zulus getting off as the boat docked at Basin Street. The King of the Zulus was the big Negro man of the town . . . . This big coronation celebration over on Congo Square, where they re-enact scenes and rituals from slavery days, with the sexual and the religious symbolism and dancing. And this particular year, Buddy Bolden was to be the King of the Zulus. (13)

Ellington continues elaborating, admitting that he wrote music for this tale, but lost it, and laments that the true history of Jazz has not been told since the writers attempting such a project “didn’t really know anything about the subject” (14). He continues more technically.

The history of jazz, of course, begins with the rhythm coming to America from Africa. It stops in the West Indies, then takes two courses: one across the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans, and the other up the East Coast. The East Coast was included to favor strings—violins, banjos and guitars—while the other development, the one that went to New Orleans and then up the Mississippi to Chicago, came out in the form of clarinets, trombones and

trumpets. And they all converged in New York and blended together, and the offspring was jazz. (Ellington 14)

The result, this cultural and technical blending of African rhythms as they played European instruments, made this phenomena we call Jazz. Duke Ellington reminds us that the initial reception of Jazz music was negative, so much so that people feared it, avoided it, and looked down on it (15).

In his seminal collection of essays entitled simply *Black Music*, Amiri Baraka (as LeRoi Jones) captures the spirit of this special music.

Negroes played jazz as they had sung blues or, even earlier, as they had shouted and hollered in those anonymous fields, because it was one of the few areas of human expression available to them. Negroes who felt the blues, later jazz, impulse, as a specific means of expression, went naturally into the music itself (12).

Key in Baraka's definition here is a sense of Jazz music as basic human creative expression, that it had and has the ability to capture what is felt in the human plight of Negroes. Baraka later explains that

Jazz, as a Negro music, existed, up until the time of the big bands, on the same socio-cultural level as the sub-culture from which it was issued. The music and its sources were secret as far as the rest of America was concerned, in much the same sense that the actual life of the black man in America was secret to the white American. (14)

This secret nature of the Negro and his music is what attracted the Beats. Jazz was and remains a well-spring of musical art. Further testimony to this is Nathaniel Mackey's definition of Jazz.

Jazz is. . . a musician's music, considered the most demanding, quintessentially musical of musical idioms by its practitioners (who typically sacrifice material security in order to pursue their art), and a music which,

much more than most, is more than music. It has become a widely deployed symbol, a signifier freighted with a panoply of meanings, attitudes and associations which are variously and sometimes conflictively aesthetic, religious, racial, political, epistemic, individual, social, philosophic, visceral, idiosyncratic, collective, utopic, dyspeptic—and on and on. It has become. . . iconic. (Lange and Mackey in Editor's Note, I)

Because Jazz is complex by nature, it is as complicated as it appears in Bob Kaufman's work; as a result, it baffles one when reading criticism of Jazz poetry to find that some critics think that Jazz is some kind of monolithic music, which mimics the idea of a monolithic concept of Black culture, like it's all the same thing. Because the word Jazz and Jazz music are loaded, and because the work of Bob Kaufman also covers various poetic ground, there is much to consider about his use of the word, its power, and layers of meaning.

In his seminal essay "Jazz at Home," J. A. Rogers in the famous *Survey Graphic* of 1925, which became *The New Negro*, describes Jazz as

a marvel of paradox: too fundamentally human, at least as modern humanity goes, to be typically racial, too international to be characteristically national, too much abroad in the world to have a special home. And yet, in spite of it all is one part American and three parts American Negro, and was originally the nobody's child or the levee and the city slum. Transplanted exotic. . . . (665)

Rogers' assessment is timeless, for Jazz is such a paradox, a blending of musical styles, Negro and American, one not complete without the other; Jazz is essentially human. Still, despite the creative force Jazz unleashed onto the American scene, it has remained like its Negro creators, a second-class citizen, fighting for full recognition of its glory and accomplishment. Although Rogers' apt comment appears in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the lack of respect of Jazz changed little by the 50s, despite the



popularity of Big Band Swing, and even that was considered “the devil’s music.”

Rogers’ “marvel of paradox” notion is helpful in attempting to appreciate Bob Kaufman’s use of Jazz, the word as a creative impulse, and the dynamic music defying category, denied its rightful place.

Rogers continues to define Jazz in even more insightful and enduring fashion.

What after all is this taking new thing, that [was] condemned in certain quarters, enthusiastically welcomed in others. . . . Jazz isn’t music merely, it is a spirit that can express itself in almost anything. This true spirit of Jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow—from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on the air. . . . It is the revolt of emotions against repression. (665)

Bob Kaufman employs the Jazz trope as a joyous creative spirit, breaking boundaries, divorcing convention—a hallmark of the Beat era ideal, but a transformative act of art becoming a saving grace for its creators and appreciators, literally liberating the soul of man in a healthy revolt, in a bloodless coup, bringing together Black and white, young and old, native and not, into a powerful harmony.

On the other hand, when Bob Kaufman refers to Jazz music, often, he is thinking of its power to obliterate what is not wanted or needed—those things like greed, the bounds of race, all that is wrong in society. He refers to BeBop, a special development in the Jazz medium, unique to his day, a form of Jazz which emerged in the 1940s associated and attributed to Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Bob Kaufman warns readers of the power of Jazz in his poem “War Memoir,” as in the opening line “Jazz—listen to it at your own risk” (*Solitudes* 52). Amiri Baraka advances the interpretation of Jazz music as the power of revolt. In *Blues People*, (1963), he instructs readers, that Jazz music known as BeBop,

“was an extreme, it was the only kind of idea that could have restored any amount of excitement and beauty to contemporary Jazz. . . .BeBop was the *coup de grace*” (cited in Robert Gottlieb’s *Reading Jazz* 870). Baraka brilliantly provides a history of Bebop’s origins as uniquely Negro; yet Jazz had fallen from the graces of the Negro middle class as too weird (cited in Robert Gottlieb’s *Reading Jazz* 870). Perhaps the reason was a s Jazz composer and performer, Harold Battiste<sup>10</sup> suggests originally, the word Jazz was spelled jass, a combination of Jack Ass, and was a derogatory term for the new music. Battiste remembers that the word Jass suggested a sexual orgasmic sound and was considered a bad word, and in the effort to popularize the music more broadly, the word changed to Jazz. Jazz in the form of Bebop is a special brand. Most importantly, Baraka defines Bebop as a

deeply felt nonconformity among many young Americans, Black and white. And for many young Negroes the irony of being thought “weird” or “deep” by white Americans was as satisfying as it was amusing. It also put on a more intellectually and psychologically satisfying level the traditional separation and isolation of the black man from America. It was a cult of protection as well as rebellion. (cited in Robert Gottlieb’s *Reading Jazz* 871)

Therefore, Baraka identifies this music as emblematic of the paradox of representation in Jim Crow America. It is here that Bob Kaufman’s use of Jazz is trope; because for Bob Kaufman, Jazz is BeBop music and much more. BeBop, Kaufman’s Jazz, is the multi-layered atonal and tonal, major and minor, flatted thirds and sevenths. Just as the Negro did not fit, BeBop broke the bounds of music in racing Charlie Parker riffs, his embrochure ready, the sheer speed of splitting melody like it was no big thing. As Dizzy Gillespie reported, “Parker could play what they heard and could not;” and for Bob Kaufman, his Jazz/BeBop epitomizes the unique and shaky place of the Negro in America

and the World, his “cult of protection and rebellion” (Baraka cited in Robert Gottlieb’s *Reading Jazz* 871). Jazz, then for Kaufman, is a trope loaded with powerful social and musical implications that were, as Baraka affirms, profound (cited in Robert Gottlieb’s *Reading Jazz* 872).

On the other hand, in his illuminating article, appearing in the “Jazz Poetics” Issue of *Callaloo* (25.1), entitled “Saxophones and Smothered Rage: Bob Kaufman, Jazz and the Quest for Redemption,” Amor Kohti declares that in Bob Kaufman’s work “The creative force of Jazz relies upon its potential as destruction as Kaufman enlists an aggressive jazz as a means towards a utopian end” (166). From Plato’s *Republic* to Sir Thomas More’s book *Utopia*, (originally written in Latin circa 1515-16) the word utopia implies that

the eternal Idea or Form of a commonwealth model that can only be approximated by political organizations in the actual world. Most utopias, beginning with that of Sir Thomas More, represent their ideal place under the fiction of a distant country reached by a venturesome traveler, some as mere Arcadian dreams, others as blueprints for social and technological progress in the actual world. (M.H. Abrams 195)

According to M.H. Abrams, such utopias are “greatly superior to the real world or manifests exaggerated versions of some of its unsavory aspects, and are used primarily as vehicles for satire on human life and society” (195). If this is the Jazz world of Bob Kaufman, his Jazz/Bebop has already accomplished this utopia, for Bebop is here for all to experience. Using Bebop, Kaufman creates something new, transforms the mediocre, elevates the human soul, and unearths intellectual and psychological genius by freeing the Negro from any limited space. Kaufman deals in what is real and surreal, what people see and reveal beneath the surface. Bebop is no fantasy; it is here, now. In the Charlie Parker (Bird) song title “Now is the time; Now is the time,” Bird sets up a notion repeated in

Kaufman's famous poem "Battle Report," when he professes that

One thousand saxophones infiltrate the city,  
Each with a man inside, . . . (1-2)  
A fleet of trumpets drops their hooks, . . . (5)  
Ten waves of trombones approach the city. . . (7)  
At last the secret code is flashed:  
Now is the time, now is the time. . .  
Attack: The sound of jazz. . . (19-20)

In Jazz poems like this, Kaufman reveals the levels of life, existence, art, and Jazz music's powers to overcome the ordinary.

Amor Kohti mis-reads Bob Kaufman's Jazz trope, however, when he states that

Kaufman deploys the jazz trope in a manner that depicts the violent potential of jazz as cloaked, but also presents the power and meaning of jazz as misunderstood. This misunderstanding is both curse and a blessing that allows jazz to offer itself as a harmless entertainment while concealing a more potent essence. (167)

Here, Amor Kohti reads Jazz as a destructive power, something for which to reach perhaps, something unattainable. Not so in Bob Kaufman's Jazz or BeBop; it lives as in his poem "Battle Report." The effect of the power and creativity of Jazz, read BeBop, bursts forth and engulfs all in its wake.

One thousand saxophones infiltrate the city,  
Each with a man inside,  
Hidden in ordinary cases,  
Labeled FRAGILE. (1-4)

Jazz music, BeBop, for Kaufman is the unassuming gift, the Trojan horse of ancient Troy in Homer's *Illiad* through which the city falls. This "Battle" is a done deal won; the "Report" details the casualties, those entering the city, the real live cities, like the special forces they are. Therefore we must read Jazz in Kaufman's poems as Bebop, which is riot gear with musicians as swat teams obliterating boredom and injustice with a base line and improvised

riffs on melody. Their combat gear is Jazz with

Five hundred bassmen, all string feet tall,  
Beating it back to the bass. (10-11)

Bebop Jazz has arrived and takes over like commandos. This is a bloodless coup of creative force, a transformative release of the human spirit.

At last, the secret code is flashed:  
Now is the time; now is the time. (18-19)

Bob Kaufman is not waiting for anything; BeBop Jazz is and spreads its encompassing shower of a living paradox, not some hoped for goal in a distant and unattainable future.

Attack: The sound of jazz.  
The city falls. (20-21)

This fall is a triumph, a victory of the spirit. This Bebop Jazz is what J.A. Rogers calls a “balm for modern ennui, and has become a safety valve for a modern machine-ridden and convention-bound society. It is the revolt of the emotions against repression” (665). Bebop Jazz for Bob Kaufman is no frill; it is a necessity whose many layers liberate and love in each note, whether whole or half-notes. Bebop/Jazz overcomes when nothing else does. For Bob Kaufman, “the beat is really the truth” (“Bagel Shop Jazz” *Solitudes* 15).

In the spring of 1975, when Tony Seymour interviewed him, Bob Kaufman defined what he was attempting when writing Jazz poetry..

I try to get . . . , what I’m looking for is to create the sound of music in poetry. But it’s not music in the orthodox sense, no. Like somebody sitting down and playing the piano, playing the saxophone or trumpet. It has to be composed in terms of words. Juxtaposition of words. Use of syntax. The use of idioms. Use of metaphors. In order to be poetry, it has to be music. It has to contain music. The music has to be different from music in the orthodox sense because you can’t put the two together. Poetry and Jazz. Poetry and music. You have two separate things creating a third dimension. Something neither flat nor round. The circle in the square. (5)

Although, there are various ways the trope of Jazz appears in the poems of Bob Kaufman, this triumphant Jazz serves as the predominant classification in his work, the one where Heaven lives in that Beat, right now and forever.

**Bob Kaufman an Oral Poet?/Improvisation.** When I met highly published New Orleans Poet, music critic, and publisher, Kalamu ya Salaam, we spoke of Bob Kaufman. With his long-standing knowledge of Jazz music and African American poetry, Kalamu waxed eloquent on Kaufman's legacy of Jazz poetry, and his "ability to improvise poetry like Jazz musicians in a performance."<sup>11</sup> At many other turns, this view that Kaufman was an "oral" poet who improvised at will stayed with me, nagging me like some valuable book lost or rather the cover of an old and used book that separates from the contents, and must be put back together. The result is a feeling of being cheated for the loss of valuable knowledge. I had to know.

Poetry readings are either good or bad. The good ones are memorable, and the bad ones, well, are not. Many people, when asked about Kaufman's readings, say that he performed like a Jazz musician, leaning into a riff of whatever was his focus, perhaps interjecting some parts of a T.S. Eliot poem, weaving in and out of his work; in this way, he has been called an "oral" poet. This is much like a Jazz musician riding a riff, taking off on a melody, departing from it, exploring chords and splitting notes, like flatted thirds and sevenths. Is Bob Kaufman an oral poet? Does he improvise like a Jazz musician, and is that what we consider an oral poet?

To answer this question, we must borrow the tools of another academic

field, Folklore. Folklorists Rosan A. Jordan and F.A. de Caro explain this dynamic.

Folkloristics is a field that tends to overlap with several other fields of study, most notably cultural anthropology and literary studies. This combining of scholarly interests and methodologies has created a multiplicity of perspectives on the material, and the result has been a notable willingness among American Folklorists to study a wide range of cultural activities and products. (*Signs* 500)

Since oral poetry and performance are arenas of discussion in Folklore, the notion of whether a person is an “oral” performer requires some common practices. First, “lore” refers to what is spoken by the “folk.” Folklore studies those materials—tales, jokes, stories, proverbs— which “circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether in oral form or by means of customary example, as well as the process of traditional performance and communication” (Brunvand 6). A clear difference between oral literature and written is that Folklore is “never transmitted *entirely* in a formal manner through printed books, phonograph records, school classes, church sermons, or by other learned, sophisticated, and commercial means” (Brunvand 5). Folklore comprises those things we learn outside of institutions of learning of any kind.

We know from the study of all people that Oral literature came first. Early humans told tales by the fireside, and good stories were passed on by word of mouth, face-to-face, generation to generation. This is the nature of Folklore, that it is a matter of transmission. It is this passing on “repeatedly” from one to another which causes versions of tales or “texts,” sometimes referred to as “variants” (Brunvand 5-6). The final requirements of oral or true Folklore are that the “text is usually anonymous,” and “it tends to become formalized” (Brunvand 5).

Some fine examples of this oral poetry are those narratives in the African American Oral Tradition we call “toasts.” These are urban narratives, the early raps performed on street corners, on porches, in prisons for entertainment. Some well-known titles are “Stagolee and Billy,” “The Signifying Monkey,” and “Shine and the Titanic.” For their collection of *African American Folklore*, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps collected these in Harlem. The toast about “Stagolee and Billy” appears in many Blues songs, performed by Brownie Magee, Snooks Eaglin, John Lee Hooker, and others. These urban oral narratives are so popular that many African American writers incorporate some aspects of these into contemporary poetry such as the version of “Shine” by Larry Neal, and a New Orleans version of “Shine” by Arturo (Arthur) Pfister. There are as many versions of these toasts as there are Black men in the community performing; each will add or delete for their particular spin on the tale, but the formula, the core tale will remain. Key to these is that they are anonymous; we don’t know who wrote them, but we love them, pass them on, each “performer” adding and improvising the tale reflecting their concerns, values, or circumstances.

As for Bob Kaufman then, he is not an oral poet in a Folkloric sense. The measure requires employing the five qualities that Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand associates with “true folklore” (5).

1. Most of Bob Kaufman’s poems were written down, and were not entirely oral in nature.
2. Kaufman’s verse is not traditional in form or transmission; his works are always original to him, and his lyrics are not expected or recognizable tales belonging to a



community with shared values.

3. Kaufman's poems are fixed versions. While he may have interjected or improvised by inserting beloved parts of great poems into his performances, he read his poems as he wrote them.

4. Kaufman is the undisputed author of his work; therefore, it is not anonymous.

5. Kaufman's poems are certainly not "formularized," but are original each time.

**Eidetic Memory.** As demonstrated, Kaufman was not an "oral poet" by the measure of such notions; but clearly, something else is present, some tool or gift of performance, or intellect.<sup>12</sup> What is it then that allows a poet to perform his verse yet recall whole passages of the works of other poets without skipping a beat? In the case of Bob Kaufman, he had Eidetic Memory.<sup>13</sup>

When I met Bob Kaufman's younger brother Donald, and in subsequent interviews, he stressed that his brother had "photographic memory." Bob's widow, Eileen Kaufman, agreed. Curious, and since I had not heard of this in regard to Bob Kaufman, I set out to learn just what they meant.

It is interesting to note that once Bob wrote a poem, he generally recited the poem as a fixed text as most poets do, ad libbing on occasion, interjecting the work of other poets he admired. There were occasions when he recited new work off the cuff, profound poems in the air, improvising as a jazz musician on a theme, a chord or an entire melody if you will, adding highlights, and then returning to his theme. I witnessed this first hand at his readings in San Francisco at Fort Mason Center called the Poets for Peace readings spear-

headed by Herman Berlandt. How, then, does this Eidetic memory fit?

Cynthia Gray and Kent Gummerman, in their article, “The Enigmatic Eidetic Image: A Critical Examination of Methods, Data, and Theories,” explain that “Eidetic imagery is well known for its “perceptlike character, its rarity, and the fact that is poorly understood” ( Gray and Gummerman 393). “A phenomenon fit for introductory psychology texts, it is typically defined as the ability to retain an accurate, detailed visual image of a complex scene or pattern (sometimes popularly known as photographic memory)” (Landauer, 1972, 5-7 quoted in Gray and Gummerman 393). It is also “the ability, possessed by a majority of people, to ‘see’ an image that is an exact copy of the original sensory experience” (Kagan & Havemann, 1972, 588 quoted in Gray and Gummerman 393). These skills, the authors suggest, allow “ the eidetiker . . .to have retentive powers such that his visual imagery experience is quite similar or identical to his perceptual experience” (Drever, 1964, 80 quoted in Gray and Gummerman 393). Gray and Gummerman indicate that eidetic recall “is quite different from ‘ordinary’ memory imagery, which is “more like a hazy etching, often incomplete and usually unstable” (Richardson, 1969 43).

Gray and Gummerman report full summaries of test subjects in various categories from young children through adulthood, technically present scientific qualifiers on behaviors and offer theories of image acquisition and memory. They report that this phenomenon is not rare and has been studied scientifically since 1920s, if not earlier (384-386). Their methods and criteria are informative, and explain this special gift of Bob Kaufman.

Apparently, Eidetic memory happens in the mind like a reflection, so it is less memory and more recall of images. The authors report the study of Jaensch “developed an elaborate account of the causes of eidetic memory,” but they questioned his findings (385). Many of the studies the authors list relied on pictures rather than text, and more recorded studies used children rather than adults. Results indicate that in some cases the phenomenon occurs early in childhood and may be outgrown (385-388). The researchers are “intrigued” at “the suitability of printed verbal material for eliciting images . . . because the ability to eidetically reproduce pages from a book would be particularly useful” (386). They cite a study by Goodenough in 1934, which stated that

There is little doubt that children who possess this ability make a good deal of use of it in their learning. Some report that they can “see” the words in their spelling lesson if they look at the wall of the room and that they copy the lesson from this eidetic image. Other lessons may be “read” in the same way when the recitation period arrives. (426 quoted in Gray and Gummerman 386).

In one study Allport conducted in 1924, “almost all of his English-speaking eidetic children could form an image of a difficult German word (*Gartenwirtschaft*) that appeared on a sign in a street scene. Three of 30 eidetikers could recite the entire word perfectly, frontward or backward, and the others could reproduce all but a few of the letters” (386). While the kids missed the point of the nonsense, the implication is significant for Bob Kaufman. This takes on a larger import in the person of young Robert, when his sister Joyce reports that he recited all day long up and down the house. We think then too, of Bob Kaufman, a voracious reader from the cradle, with a college-educated mother who encouraged intellectual dinner-table debates, book reports, and political arguments. Another point Gray and Gummerman make which has implications for Bob Kaufman’s life

and performance is that eidetic memory is rarer in adulthood, that the capacity for accuracy is great when it lasts, which is why people mistakenly call this gift photographic memory (387). However, they caution that “perceptlike imagery is accurate in some, and not in other children” (387). Also, the authors explain that “the eidetic image is considerably more dynamic than the photograph analogy implies” (388). According to Allport, because the reflection occurs in the mind, an emotional experience heightens recall, one that it is fueled by the imagination (388). The implication for Bob Kaufman is this; if he read a book and liked it, it became his forever. This is the Bob Kaufman who could perform long passages of T. S. Eliot’s poetic drama, *Murder in the Cathedral* within and between performing his poems. Bob Kaufman’s widow has insisted that when he came out of his vow of silence, at the end of the Vietnam war, it was this Eliot piece that he recited in its entirety.

It is no wonder that Bob Kaufman’s performances are legendary; his gifts were immense.

**The Black Arts Movement.** The Black Arts Movement grew out of the struggle for civil rights. Informed by the history and cultural flowering of the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro period, Negroes learned their worth, began to appreciate their beauty while demanding equal rights in America. The result was a blossoming of art and culture whose purpose was at once aesthetic coupled with a “revolutionary ideal,” concerned with community building in a social and political sense. The notion that Black is Beautiful served to fuel Black Power; where once there were Negroes and Colored people, now there

were Blacks, proud Blacks confronting injustice artistically, socially, and politically. During this period referred to as the “sixties,” Blacks found a voice, a dignified past, and a host of contributions to society previously buried or ignored by the status quo. This movement fostered what has come to be known as the Black Aesthetic, what writer Larry Neal claimed as the aesthetic and spiritual sister to Black Power according to Kalamu ya Salaam (70).

According to Dr. Jerry W. Ward, Jr., in its efforts to throw off the shackles of the oppressor, this period was also characterized by a dismissal of formal white poetics as a matrix of the enslaved. The ideal was to champion community values and to create for Black people. As Dr. Ward insists, the goal was to serve the intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural needs of the people. Still, the push was for the excellence newly discovered in the vast contributions of a dignified ancestry on these shores and in the Mother/Fatherland. Standards of excellence and Black Aesthetics were upheld by the artists and intellectuals of the community.

Key to the success of these notions was not only a proliferation of Black art, literature, music, but also means of production, in the form of a host of small publishing concerns whose sole aim was to communicate, develop, distribute, and promote the Black Arts ideals. These included *Umbra* magazine,<sup>14</sup> the product of the New York City workshops of the same name. In California, Robert Christian with Nathan Hare founded *The Black Scholar*, and Joe Concalves established *The Journal of Black Poetry*. In Chicago, the Johnson publication’s *Negro Digest* became *Black World*. Poet Haki Madhubuti founded Third World Press in Chicago; and in Detroit, Dudley Randall founded

Broadside Press, while Naomi Long Madgett set up Lotus Press. Other major organs were *Black Theater* magazine, and *Black Dialogue*. These publications and publishers provided a means to cultivate talent and to present it professionally, thereby preserving this creative output with a purpose.

By the mid 1960s, Nathan Hare founded Black Studies. Historically Black Howard University expelled Hare, and he moved to San Francisco State University where he flourished with Dr. Julia Hare. Sonia Sanchez was at San Francisco State University teaching for a time, as was activist Angela Davis, among others. Ron Karenga later founded his Kwaaida ideal of the Seven Principles of Kwanza to counter Christmas commercialism and to encourage cultural and non-sectarian spiritual concerns.

Further fueling this movement was the development of Black community centers, active Black theatre companies such as The Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School, The Free Southern Theatre in New Orleans, the Negro Ensemble Theater company, and many others.

In addition, Black writers [such as LeRoi Jones, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ishmael Reed, John Oliver Killens, Maya Angelou, Harold Cruse] were securing publishing contracts from mainstream publishers. Later, in a change of heart toward Black Consciousness, Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks began publishing her works with Third World Press, and did much to aid its firm foundation.

Not enough can be said for the influence of principal poet LeRoi Jones whose BAM transformation to a political activist was symbolized by changing his name to Amiri Baraka. With Larry Neal, he edited the seminal anthology *Fire*, which promoted revolutionary ideals on a national scale. Don L. Lee became Haki Madhubuti. Val

Ferdinand became Kalamu ya Salaam. These name changes speak to the reclamation of the Negro's African roots. While this was not a universal practice, it was widespread.

Other notable and influential writers of the period who did not change their names were Sonia Sanchez (considered the cultural Godmother of the movement) and Nikki Giovanni, whose poems so moved the masses. From the south came Tom Dent who organized the Umbra writers workshop and later spearheaded the editing and publishing of *Umbra* magazine, where new writers like Alice Walker appeared. Dent, after returning to his hometown of New Orleans, co-founded the Free Southern Theatre with Jon O'Neal. With Kalamu ya Salaam, Dent co-founded Black Arts South. Out of this organization, Dent, ya Salaam and created the Congo Square Writers Workshops, of which significant contributions were made by writers Raymond Breau and Quo Vadis Gex Breau.

It was in such community writers' workshops that a new generation of writers were nurtured. In the Northwest, it was the United Black Artists Guild, founded by poet professor Colleen McElroy. This organization published *Dark Waters*, at least one issue of which was edited by National Book Award winner Charles Johnson, who published my earliest poetry in an issue with John Edgar Wideman and Oregon's Primas St. John.

Like the Harlem Renaissance, the success of this publishing movement was made possible by many different organizations, from the Black Panthers, who published a popular newspaper, to the Black Muslims, who provided *The Final Call*, their organ. These and the publishing ventures mentioned earlier provided appropriate documentation of ideals and methods for dissemination of artifacts produced during the period.

The Black Arts Movement ironically lost steam as a result of integration, when

communities dispersed and Blacks were no longer forced to remain segregated; as a result, Blacks did not maintain economic and organizational efforts as a collective to the same degree as experienced in the 60s.

With regard to the Black Arts Movement and a Black Aesthetic, Bob Kaufman prefigures these ideas on several levels linguistically, ideologically, and culturally. Most importantly, before it was popular for the Beats or Blacks, the images he portrayed in his work of subjects, such as Ray Charles, Charlie Parker, and Charles Mingus, operated in a conscious effort to raise the image of the Negro as a contributor to the larger American and Black cultures. This was one of the central values of the new movement and aesthetics, to nurture positive self-images, to see the Negro in a new light, not just as the “problem” that politicians and angry whites complained about so bitterly. For example, the opening stanza of his poem entitled “Blues Note” illustrates this point.

Ray Charles is a black wind of Kilimanjaro,  
Screaming up-and-down blues,  
Moaning happy on all the elevators of my time. (*Solitudes* 20, 1-3)

Charles is portrayed as a force of musical genius, making a “blues” that screams and moans “happy” on all levels to everyone including Kaufman. He is acknowledging early that Ray Charles’s music is a significant part of American culture. Kaufman is writing with passion for Ray Charles’s skill and effect on audiences; and at the same time, he delivers a deep conviction of the place Charles, therefore other Blacks like him, occupy in a predominantly white society. The force of Jazz music, its musicians, and the original compositions are hailed in other poem titles such as “Round About Midnight” (*Golden Sardine*), “Mingus” and “Blues Note” (*Solitudes*) and other instances where this Negro



contribution must be respected for its importance.

In addition, linguistically, Kaufman prefigures the Black Aesthetic in his use of the vernacular of the Negro, specifically, Jazz musicians with such words as “hip,” “hipster,” “cat” for man especially in the poem “West Coast Sounds –1956”( *Solitudes* 11). In this way, the talk of the Negro is elevated by its use in literature. This usage had been in the Negro world since the Jazz of the 20s when Cab Calloway was on the bandstand, but Kaufman places this street speech into poetry in such lines as “San Fran, hipster land (line 1), and “New York Cats,/ Too many cats” (lines 17-18). Also, there is Kaufman’s use of the word “black.” It was not until the end of the turbulent 60s that the word Black was used to refer to African Americans and became a household anthem. For example, James Brown, the rhythm and blues performer popular since the 50s, brought the word to the commercial world in April of 1969 with his hit “Say it Loud-I’m Black and I’m Proud.” Prior to the BAM, the word Black was a negative; and in one line in the poem to Ray Charles, Kaufman elevates the word black to the power of an elemental force rising from a dignified mountain geographically positioned in the Mother/Fatherland.

Another way Kaufman anticipates the BAM is his obvious use of the Mother/Fatherland Africa as a symbol of power, a place of human origins. Before mid-nineteenth century, most Negroes had little or no knowledge of their African roots. They were many generations away from slavery; further, African history did not exist in text books. Africa, in the popular mind, was nothing more than a place of monkeys and savages, not the place where humanity began. The mention of Kilimanjaro brings to mind the African country Kenya, near the region of the Olduvai Gorge, called the “cradle of

mankind,” in the Serengeti, where traces of the oldest humanoid fossils were found. In this way, Kaufman acknowledges his African roots long before it was popular. In the same *Solitudes* collection, another poem is called “African Dream,” (4) where he recalls ancient rituals, forests, drumming through time. In Kaufman’s poems, Negroes are no longer bastards, but an ancient people with connection to the world, indeed, the root of humanity.

The initial copyright for the *Solitudes* collection is 1959; as the process for publishing was more time consuming then, these poems were written earlier. In these ways, linguistically, engendering positive self images, celebrating the contributions of Black people as original and central to American culture, and in connecting positively to a proud heritage in the Mother/Fatherland Africa, Bob Kaufman is clearly a precursor to the Black Arts Movement and the Black Aesthetic.

## Chapter 2, Part II: Biographical Research

*Circumstances rule men; men do not rule circumstances.*

Anonymous

**Poet As Man.** Some know the Bob Kaufman of North Beach. Some are familiar with the poet the French hailed as The Black Rimbaud, the “quintessential beatnik” as Raymond Foy put it, that bohemian poet who was a Buddhist; all are monikers placed on him. It is clear that Bob Kaufman, the man and his poems, touched his readers, his fans, his friends, and especially his family. There are notorious anecdotes about his exploits and fond remembrances of his oratory and poetic performances. To date, little has been known of his background, and his upbringing in New Orleans. Yet, the New Orleans environment gave rise to his literary prowess.

As is customary, since Bob Kaufman was born into a Black practicing Catholic Creole family that worshiped at Sunday services in the neighborhood church of Corpus Christi Parish, Bob was baptized on August 21, 1925. As the birthplace of Jazz music, New Orleans was becoming more widely known for this music, just after Bob Kaufman’s birth. By, 1931, one of the Jazz originators, Charles “Buddy” Bolden died, and Dorothy Lamour became Miss New Orleans. In the Creole downtown area, five minutes from the

French Quarter, street vendors hawking fruit and vegetables were common on a daily basis, and live chickens were selected and bought. The Black Catholic Church, Corpus Christi, founded in 1917, gave considerable relief for the Creole neighborhood whose parishioners had previously been relegated to the rear pews of the segregated white Sacred Heart Church a few blocks away on to St. Bernard Avenue near Claiborne Avenue, which at the time had a bustling Creole cultural and market area lined with the graceful canopies of live oak trees already two hundred years old.

**The Early Years.** If Bob Kaufman's poetic production and life antics are the stuff of legend, stories of his family origin add to his mystique. The most common scenario is that his father was a "German Orthodox Jew," and his mother was "a Negress from Martinique" (Winans 275). Maria Damon reports that "Although Kaufman himself encouraged this version of his genealogy, his brother George says that their paternal grandfather was [part] Jewish, and their schoolteacher mom came from an old, well-known Black New Orleans family, the Vignes" (33).

**Bob Kaufman's Mom.** As for the Martinique background of Lillian Rose Vignes, little is known; but according to Bob Kaufman's birth certificate, she was a native of Louisiana. Bob's brother Donald says that their mother grew up on St. Peter Street in the French Quarter (the *Vieux Carré*). Bob Kaufman's maternal grandmother, Lillian Rose's birth mother, was a Mrs. Adelle Edward Brown (Perkins). Lillian Rose had at least two siblings, Mrs. Blanche McMillan and George Kyles (*Times Picayune* May 23, 1966). Mrs. Adelle E. Brown died on Tuesday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1966 at 5:00 p.m. (*Times Picayune* May 23, 1966). While it is currently not known why, Lillian Rose was adopted by Lee Vignes

and his wife Coralie Deslonde; her sisters by that family were Mrs. Cora Vignes Wilson and Mrs. Mathilde Vignes Perkins, and a brother Elvan Vignes. The Vignes were a middle-class Creole<sup>15</sup> family and were prominently known in the New Orleans downtown community. Although adopted by the Vignes family, Lillian Rose maintained a familial relationship with her mother throughout her life, and had her children refer to her mom as Grandma Brown (D. Kaufman). Physically, Lillian Rose Vignes was so fair skinned that she could pass for white; she had fine curly hair and hazel eyes.

Bob Kaufman was the seventh son of thirteen siblings.<sup>16</sup> His was a close-knit family nurtured largely, but not entirely, by their mother, Lillian Rose (Vignes) Kaufman. A very bright student, as a young girl, Lillian Rose Vignes received a citation entitled a “Testimonial of Merit” which was awarded on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1902 and signed by her teacher Sarah A. Yates, Chast Gingham, the principal, and Warren Easton, then Superintendent of Public Schools (Perkins family document). She is praised “for regular and punctual attendance, correct deportment, and diligent attention to study during the past annual session” (Perkins family document). Prior to her marriage, Lillian Rose Vignes completed all the requirements for the degree and graduated from Southern University Agricultural and Mechanical College Normal School on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1912 in New Orleans (Perkins family document). Her degree is signed by then president of the college, H.A. Hill, and lists the faculty. The next year, Lillian Rose studied at the Tuskegee Institute Summer School in 1913 (Perkins family document, Appendix B ).

According to the New Orleans Public School (NOPS) *Minutes Book*, Lillian Rose Vignes was first tested then assigned to a “List of Eligibles,” that is candidates who

passed (5). Her exam score was 82.80 and was the second highest of those tested (*Minutes* 5). Lillian Rose is listed as “c/,” meaning Colored, and was appointed to her first and only teaching position in October 1912 (*Minutes* 5). Her name also appears in the annual New Orleans Public School *Teachers Register*, the 1913 edition. As a single woman with an education, she embarked on a teacher’s life, and she was assigned to the Bayou Road school.<sup>17</sup>

While there was no resignation letter included in the minutes, Lillian Rose Vignes resigned January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1914 in the middle of the school year (*Minutes* 5). Why? Two weeks later, she married Bob Kaufman’s father Joseph Emmet Kaufman. Married women were not allowed to teach in those days. Married until Joseph’s death in 1938, Lillian Rose Kaufman devoted herself to her family, raising her children lovingly, but with firm discipline.

As Mrs. Lillian Rose Vignes was a lover of learning, the family library consisted of twenty-five volumes of the first Balzac translation in English, as well as the works of Proust, Hugo, James, Milton, Dante, Flaubert, and most of the classics (Perkins). The living room walls were lined in books, and books were everywhere throughout the house (Perkins). An astute bibliophile, Mrs. Kaufman would buy “entire libraries at estate sales” (Damon 34).

**Younger Sister Joyce.** According to Bob’s sister Joyce, everybody read at home; they swapped books, argued about what they read, discussed politics. They all ate together as a family; dinner time was an occasion for debate and talk of current events. Bob’s brother Donald said the kids couldn’t leave the dinner table before the evening

paper was read and discussed; they read current authors as well as classics, and everyone tried to outdo the other. An accomplished pianist, Mrs. Lillian Rose Kaufman played all kinds of music from classical to Blues to Jazz; she loved it all, and so did the entire family (Perkins). “We all listened to the opera. Our favorite was a Saturday radio show called ‘Texaco Presents the Met’” (Perkins).

Bob’s younger sister Joyce also remembers that their mother tutored them with school work; she corrected their papers and encouraged study. The kids also “had extemporaneous limerick contests on the front porch” (Damon 34). Robert always won; according to Donald, this competition was strictly literary, although they knew “the dozens” as well as “toasts,” which were popular at the time. It was Robert, Joyce says, who took to literature; he read constantly and recited incessantly, walking up and down the house reciting to imaginary audiences. She fondly remembers her mother telling Robert to quiet down. Lillian Rose Kaufman died of cancer of the larynx in 1953 at age 57 (*Times Picayune* 12). Her mother outlived her.

**Younger Brother Donald.** Donald favored his mother strongly in his fair-skin, coloring and light, almost blue eyes; although, he closely resembled his elder brother Bob.

**Elder Brother Joseph.** Joyce remembers that the eldest sibling, Joseph Emmet, who was named for his dad, told stories to the younger kids, funny stories. Joseph, at one time, had a horse and buggy, and they all argued about who would drive (Perkins). Joseph served in the United State Army in Korea as a Lieutenant (*Times Picayune* 12). He retired as an Army major after living in Germany for many years (Perkins).

**Seaman Brother George.** The George of whom Dr. Damon writes was the fifth

Kaufman sibling and a Merchant Seaman. It was George who helped his little brother sign up with the Merchant Marine (Damon 33). At the time, Bob was only seventeen years old, not the thirteen of popular legend, and had already graduated from McDonogh #35 High School in the Seventh Ward, New Orleans (Boyd).

**The Southern Black Jewish Heritage: Bob's Father and Family.** Bob

Kaufman's father is another story. Joseph Emmet Kaufman was born November 19, 1884 in Lakeland, Louisiana (Corpus Christi, *The Marriage Register (TMR)* 21). When he married Lillian Vignes Kaufman in 1914, he was a Pullman Porter, and worked for the railroads at least until Bob Kaufman was born in 1925. While on Bob's birth certificate, his father is listed as a "Porter," Donald Kaufman insists that his dad was home most of the time, and that "Porter" also meant waiter. Joseph Emmet Kaufman was a waiter for the most part according to Donald. He worked at the Boston Club, the Beverly Country Club, the Pickwick Club, and the Auto Stop Club (D. Kaufman). To work in those fancy clubs, a man had to be very good at service, had to speak very well, converse intelligently with guests, be prepared to do favors, run errands or make arrangements for private parties of regular guests; he had to have class (D. Kaufman). Donald says his dad worked the clubs with a group of men including Abe Jackson and Paul Gross; they made good tips because they were good at what they did. Later, Abe had a place of his own on Ursuline and Claiborne, and Paul Gross opened a chicken shack on Bienville. "It was about seven or eight of them that used to work at those nice clubs" (D. Kaufman). Donald was about five years old when his father died on May 20, 1938 in the home at 1660 N. Tonti Street in the Seventh Ward.<sup>18</sup> Joseph Emmet Kaufman suffered from a weak heart, and waiter



work was stressful to his condition (D. Kaufman). Since Lillian Rose and Joseph Emmet were married first in a civil ceremony, they were re-married in the Catholic Church at Corpus Christi, their home parish, on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1938. This re-marriage is called a Validation or a formal blessing by the church; it allowed Joseph a Christian burial, which would be impossible without a sanctioned marriage (*TMR* 21). Joseph Emmet Kaufman was laid to rest in St. Louis Cemetery II, where his wife would be placed with him at her death (Corpus Christi, *The Death Register [TDR]* 10).

On Bob Kaufman's birth certificate, his father, Joseph Emmet Kaufman is listed as "Colored." He was born to Abraham Kaufman and Olive Allen in Lakeland, Louisiana<sup>19</sup> (Corpus Christi *TMR* 21). This is where the notion of the German Orthodoxy comes into place in Bob's life. Joseph Emmet's father's name, Abraham Kaufman, was decidedly Jewish, although Joseph Emmet was baptized on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1885 at Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mary Catholic Church. His parents are listed as Leopold (Abraham) Kaufman and Olive Allen, and his Godparents were George and Pamelie Gross (*Immaculate Conception, Lakeland* Book 5, 33). The Allens had two strains, one white and one Black; both families are descendants of the founder of Point Coupee Parish, Francois Allen; he and his brothers became prominent planters in the river region (R. Richard). According to Rodger Kamenetz, because of the power of the founding Creole family in the area, this was marrying well for Kaufman. Leopold (Abraham) Kaufman was born Pierre Leo Kaufman May 25<sup>th</sup> 1850 (*Point Coupee* Book 10, 144). Leopold Abraham's father, Paul Gustav Adolph Abraham Kaufman was born on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1805 or 1815—the record lists both dates; he was German Jewish but was baptized

Catholic April 11, 1846, and lists his father as Joseph Alexander Kaufman (*Point Coupeé* Book 10, 61). Donald Kaufman remembers hearing stories about the early Kaufman family, and that they came from Frankfort, Germany. When I asked Ellen Merrill regarding her research on German names in Louisiana, she clarified that the name Kaufman in the Point Coupeé was German, meaning merchant, and there were Jewish families who settled there.

Paul Gustav Adolph Abraham Kaufman's name is a dead give-a-way that he was a German Jew. He seems to have been unafraid of persecution since he did not change his name. It is conceivable that he converted to Catholicism, not to avert oppression, but for love. He married a Creole woman named Margaret Melina (sometimes appearing as

**Table 1. Kaufman Paternal Lineage, Point Coupeé Parish, Louisiana**

Melanie) Porché on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1847 one year after he was baptized (*Point Coupeé* Book 8, 61). Paul Gustav Adolph Abraham Kaufman was a doctor according to

Name	Origin	Race	Ties
Joseph Alexander Kaufman	German/Jewish (GJ)	White (W)	Gr. gr. Grand father
Paul Gustav Adolph Abraham Kaufman (Converts to Catholic to marry a Creole)	GJ	W	Great Grandfather
Leopold (Abraham) Kaufman ne Pierre Leo Kaufman (Marries a Black Creole)	GJ	W	Grandfather
Joseph Emmet Kaufman	GJ/Colored	C	Father of Bob Kaufman

the Diocese records (*Point Coupee* Book 8, 61). As a result, on his father's side, Bob Kaufman's parentage reads with a line of two generations of German Jews before one marries a Black woman. See **Table 1**.

It is not clear when Bob Kaufman's dad, Joseph Emmet, moved to New Orleans, but his lineage was no mystery. Since Bob was an intellectual and avid reader who spent significant time with his father while ill and at home at the end of his dad's life, it is no wonder that when grown, he incorporated his knowledge of family history into his life and work. His brother Donald says that Robert always referred to himself as a "Black Jew." In his work, in the poem "Grandfather was queer, too," from the *Solitudes* collection, the persona is a Kaufman-like figure, but the opening line continues from the title, "He was

first seen in a Louisiana bayou.” The narrator reports the surreal adventures of the persona, which culminates in Kaufman’s white grandfather marrying a Black Creole. For Bob, that meant that his ancestor was aware of the absurdities of the world, but threw off limitations in spite of circumstances.

**Bob’s Beginnings.** This lineage brings us back to Bob Kaufman himself. It might surprise some Kaufman admirers how literally place, especially New Orleans, appears in his work. At the time of his birth, Bob’s family lived in a house at 1665 N. Miro Street (Blair 18). In *The Ancient Rain* collection, Bob’s poem “Rue Miro” is a testimony to his roots in New Orleans.

MIRO . . . THERE IS A STREET WITH YOUR NAME, NAMED  
BEFORE  
    YOU, AFTER YOU. . . .  
    A WET PLACE, OF HOT RAINS, & YELLOWED LONG LEAF  
    PLANTS, NAMED FOR A BROKEN SUN KING, LOUISIANA  
    RHYMES WITH YESTERDAY, GONE, PAST, MOVED ON,  
    GHOSTLY, BROWN WISHES . . . .  
MIRO . . . I WAS BORN ON YOUR STREET, FORTY THOUSAND  
YEARS  
    AGO IN A YEAR OF APRILS & SCREAMED A FLOCK OF  
    DAZED GEESE STAGGERED.  
MIRO . . . ON THAT STREET, I HEARD A FEVER & SAW A WHITE  
MOON, BY THE GALVEZ GREENS, BROKEN INTO  
MILLIONS  
    OF TRANSPARENCIES (9).

Miro is one block away and parallel to Galvez Street; both are main arteries in New Orleans’ Seventh Ward neighborhood, and are lined with small neighborhood gardens that after spring rains are often overgrown with St. Joseph Lillies, Crepe Myrtle trees, azaleas, elephant-leaf philodendrons, and grass. Passages such as these echo that New Orleans Seventh Ward neighborhood in Kaufman’s work, his Seventh Ward

neighborhood.

**School Years.** Like his brothers and sisters, Bob Kaufman attended Valena C. Jones public grammar school. The family was living at 1660 N. Tonti across the street from a New Orleans public school, McDonogh #9, which at the time was segregated white. It was a general family contention that it was idiotic that they had to walk twelve blocks to the “Colored” school, when there was a perfectly good one across the street from their family home (D. Kaufman).<sup>20</sup> For Bob Kaufman, this is the south that cannot hear “The Ancient Rain.” He writes, “The Ancient Rain wets my face and I am freed from hatreds of me that disguise themselves with racist bouquets” (78). “The Southern bloc cannot see it” (79).

It is interesting to note that in January 1938, Bob Kaufman was a bonafide Boy Scout of America. His application “certifies that Robert Kaufman had been a Second Class Scout for four months in Troop No. 144 of the St. John Divine Division and that he is qualified to pass the TEST for the Woodwork Merit Badge” (Perkins family document). Though his older brothers were more athletically inclined, Robert did have pursuits external to the household and outside of reading, writing, and reciting.

Bob Kaufman’s schoolmates remember him during school days. Mr. Clarence Watts says that Bob was smart, so very smart; the whole family was smart. Mr. Watts remembers Bob’s anger at living across from McDonold #9 and not being able to attend. He says all of the sisters were smart too, the whole gang. They were a popular family; everyone loved their mother. Mr. Watts was three years older than Robert, but started school late which was not uncommon in those days; he began at seven years old instead of

five. His younger brother, now living in Los Angeles, was actually in Bob's classroom. Mr. Watts confirms that Bob Kaufman went to Albert Wicker Middle School and finished school at McDonogh #35 High School in 1942.

Mrs. Elise Dunn Caine, while she was still a student at Albert Wicker Middle School, was sweet on Bob Kaufman. It was 1942, and Robert was already graduated from High School and about to leave for the Merchant Marine. He was a charmer, was intelligent, came from a fine family, and was so attractive (1994). Bob often kept to himself and his siblings, Mrs. Caine remembers, but he was good with everyone, outgoing, articulate, and romantic. She insists that he was "her guy" in those days. Bob, she says, could converse on anything going on in the world as well as the latest Jazz, and he was never boring (1994).

Another childhood friend, Mrs. Rhea Lucien, lived on Tonti Street and knew the Kaufman household while growing up. Her friend, Dr. Anthony R. Donfor (Ph.d., physics), "Don" as she calls him, was always in and out of the Kaufman home. Don was a very close friend of George Kaufman, Bob's older brother. Mrs. Lucien remembers seeing Mrs. Kaufman sitting on the porch. Like other neighbors, she knew Mrs. Kaufman to be a school teacher; but at the time she knew them, Mrs. Kaufman was a housewife; she was always home with the kids and often sat on the front porch on Tonti Street to watch the kids play.

Bob Kaufman was only thirteen years old when his father died. The absence of his father placed an understandable economic strain on the single-parent household of thirteen siblings. During his senior year in high school, the depression still had a hold on

New Orleans. It was no wonder that after graduation, Bob Kaufman followed his elder brother George's lead and took to the sea for a living.

**Off to the Sea.** Contrary to popular lore on Bob Kaufman, he was not at sea for twenty years. He did join the Merchant Marine from New Orleans after high school. On June 18, 1942, Bob Kaufman was certified by the Department of Commerce, the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation as physically fit, free from communicable diseases, and rated as food handler on merchant vessels of the United States (see Appendix D for his Seaman's records). He is described as seventeen years old, five-feet-seven inches tall with a small scar on his forehead. The same day, he was issued a Certificate of Service as "Messman," which included a photo with his signature for identification purposes (Appendix D).

On his initial voyage on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1942 from New Orleans to Galveston, Texas, Bob Kaufman was rated as "utility," and shipped out on June 24<sup>th</sup>. Then, he traveled to New York city and shipped out from New York on the *Winfield Scott* on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1942 to points "nearby foreign." His next recorded travel shows that he shipped out from Boston for a foreign voyage on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1943 as a "Messman;" both "Utility," "Messman," or "Utility Messman" are the positions he held throughout his tenure as a Merchant Seaman. These were helping positions from assisting cooks with preparation and cleanup to cleaning and caring for designated areas of the ship. His travels took him far away to ports such as to Calcutta, India, and Ceylon often in the next three years. He was regularly based in New York city where he resided at 1070 Fox Street in the Bronx. By 1945, his rating changed to Storekeeper, Chief Pantry, and Officers Mess, and he

shipped out of New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Baltimore on a regular basis. Many of Bob Kaufman's voyages were to foreign ports and their destinations were secret. By this time, World War II was in full swing, and the Merchant Marine serviced the United States armed forces by shipping supplies, machinery, and sometimes arms. For these reasons, the Merchant Marine who served during WWII were given "Veteran" status.

Over the years since Kaufman died, George Kaufman, Donald Kaufman, Maria Damon, Kathryne V. Lindberg, and Aldon Nielsen have all insisted that Bob played a role in the labor union of the Merchant Marine. None of them have substantiated this connection. Since he tended not to be a "joiner," for some time, I had doubts about his formal involvement. While there are still few details, there is proof of this. New York University has a complete set of the newspaper *The Pilot*, the official organ of the National Maritime Union (NMU).<sup>21</sup> Twice in 1945, Bob Kaufman's picture appears in *The Pilot*, regarding his activities with the NMU. In one, a large picture, he is with four other NMU organizers. The caption reads as follows.

[The title] "Congress Will Know" how the people feel. If delegations like the one above continue to go to Washington, D.C. In this case, it's a delegation from NMU which demanded the renewal of the appropriation to continue FEPC. Left to right are Brothers Gonzales, Hart, Pedersen, Walton and Kaufman, the chairman. (*The Pilot* 7/6/45)

In another issue in the same year, Bob Kaufman is pictured standing near the top of a wooden ladder, speaking to a crowd from a microphone. That captions read as listed below.

The Facts: NMUer Robert Kaufman, in charge of the Union's sound truck campaign to bring the story of seamen's wages to the people, takes a turn at the mike on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, one of the truck's many stopping points. (*Pilot*



photo) (*The Pilot* 1945)

This picture and caption appeared above an article entitled “SIU Members Support NMU’s Wage Drive,” and no author is listed (*The Pilot* 1945). Kaufman is not mentioned within the article which address the need for better seaman wages and benefits for their wives and the united effort of the NMU (*The Pilot* 1945). Finally, we now know when and in what way Bob Kaufman’s concern for the working man pushed him into the labor struggle of the NMU. These seamen risked their lives transporting necessary equipment and supplies for United States military; and now, we know Bob Kaufman was fighting for the rank and file while he was one of them.

Regarding Bob’s years at sea, Eileen Kaufman recalls that on one of his voyages to Iceland, he contracted frostbite, and could no longer stand to wear closed-in shoes. It was for this reason that Bob wore open-toed sandals all of the time. On another voyage, she relays, he was indeed ship-wrecked, and he lost a large percentage of his hearing.<sup>22</sup> This incident was probably in 1945 when he applied for duplicate shipping certificates and Seaman identification from the United States Coast Guard in New York City, claiming his papers had been lost.

Bob Kaufman served faithfully in the Merchant Marine through June of 1948 when he shipped out from ports in New York and Baltimore again to foreign ports and “coastwise.” According to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry on Kaufman by A.D. Winans, prior to his arrival in New York, “Kaufman’s literary education began under the tutelage of a sea-going first mate, who urged him to read the great writers and loaned him many fine books.” This has become a widely-held notion, which was restated

by Bob's widow, Eileen Kaufman, in David Henderson's introduction to *Cranial Guitar*. The truth is that Bob Kaufman always wrote, and regularly won limerick and toast contests on the front porch as a child. Just as he was always jotting something down on paper, he was always reciting. Even as a young boy, his sister Joyce recalls him walking up and down the house preaching, speaking as if to an audience. As a result, just as writers workshop, share ideas, and grow through each creative relationship, Bob did find a sea-faring first mate with whom he passed books and poems, but his literary education began at home in New Orleans. Bob Kaufman left the south cultured, learned, and according to his family reciting and scribbling constantly. It is significant to note that both Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac served in the Merchant Marine; while Kaufman did not meet them until later on the West Coast, this seafaring life was another important experience they shared as friends.

It was during those seaman's years spent in and out of New York city that he became the friend of and roommate to visual artist Joe Overstreet; they lived on the East side near the Village. Abstract Expressionism was the craze in the arts, and Jazz was a favored medium of expression. Their pad was famous for gatherings. Charlie Parker and Billie Holiday were friends of Bob in those days as well; after gigs, they sometimes came over to his place. Playwright Douglass Turner Ward knew Bob then too.

It was also during this time, his brother Donald remembers, that Bob Kaufman worked for Martin Tonio, one of the most prominent Union leaders at the time. It was these years that Bob spoke at Union gatherings and worked to galvanize appropriate representation for workers.

In the years prior to 1950, when Bob Kaufman lived in New York city, he met José Luis Gonzalez (1926-1996), one of Puerto Rico's foremost writers and social critics (Lewis). According to Librarian and Gonzalez scholar, Herbert Rogers, Gonzalez received his B.A. from the University of Puerto Rico in 1946, and was awarded a fellowship from UPR for graduate work in Political Science at the New School for Social Research in New York for the academic year 1946-47.<sup>23</sup> Rogers says that Gonzalez mentioned to him that he met Kaufman in the village. Many have indicated that Kaufman studied at The New School, but there is no official record of his attendance at any time. Gonzalez did not mention to Rogers that Kaufman took courses. Knowing Bob Kaufman, he probably held court with professors and students alike in those days.

Rogers asserts that after Gonzalez's initial year of study at The New School, he returned to New York for a year from 1948 to 49.<sup>24</sup> Gonzalez was Herbert Rogers' "professor at the National University of Mexico, where he was professor of Latin American Literature and the Sociology of Literature" (2/4/99). "He was a very popular professor and very erudite scholar without any pretensions of being a snob" (Rogers 2/4/99). According to Herbert, Gonzalez was fluent in English, but his work did not appear in translation until the mid-sixties; he is considered one of Puerto Rico's greatest writers, a short story writer, novelist, essayist, and translator (2/4/99). Gonzalez did tell Herbert once that if he ran into Kaufman in New York, to tell him that José sends his regards (2/4/99).

In Mexico, in 1976, José Luis Gonzalez edited and published with his former student Monica Mansour an anthology of Black poets entitled *Poesia Negro de America*

(Rogers 2/1/99). In this anthology, two Kaufman poems, “I Too, Know what I am Not” and “Blues Note,” appear in English with a Spanish translation (Rogers 2/1/99). It is conceivable that Bob Kaufman, since he was fluent in Spanish, translated these for Gonzalez.

On a recent research trip to Mexico City, Herbert Rogers found a rather autobiographical short story by José Luis Gonzalez entitled “¿Que hicieron los astecas?” which is set in New York , and Bob Kaufman appears in it (11/21/00).<sup>25</sup> Herbert says the story is dated 1984 but the time frame is in the 1950s (11/21/00).<sup>26</sup> Working from memory, Herbert relays a rough translation as follows.

The story deals with José Luis Gonzales’s life in New York. There is an incident involving Kaufman, and he ends up at the apartment of José Luis Gonzalez and the woman living with him. Kaufman is seen kissing a white woman, and there are these white guys who do not like what they have seen. The white guys chase Kaufman to the apartment of José Luis Gonzalez. Gonzales and his lover open their apartment to Kaufman so that the would be lynchers will not capture Kaufman. The police are called. Kaufman spends the night with Gonzalez and Sylvie in the apartment and they pass the night away getting drunk (Rogers 12/5/00).

The incident is fascinating, and so like Bob Kaufman. He was a man ahead of his times. The gist of the story is also so much a part of the 40s and 50s social climate for Black and Hispanic musicians and artists; even in New York Jim Crow was forcing them into their so-called place .

In the time Bob shipped in and out of New York, he also met and married his first wife, Ida Baccaral. Bob’s sister Joyce remember that Ida spoke with an accent, but couldn’t identify it. Very little is known of Ida. Bob and Ida had a daughter, Antoinette Victoria Kaufman.

After his maritime career, and initial New York days, Bob and his younger brother Donald traveled to Texas, where they knew people. Donald remembers living with Bob in San Antonio. The brothers worked for a family friend who had a nightclub. Donald says Texans thought Robert was Spanish. "He could pass; he had that look." Donald also says that when he arrived, Robert instructed him to say nothing. "Let me do all the talking cause you're going to ruin it," Donald recalls Robert saying. "Well," Donald continued, "Robert was fluent in Spanish, not that broken stuff; he spoke pure Spanish. He spoke better Spanish than I speak English." Donald lived with Robert in San Antonio from 1951 to 1953 when they decided to go to San Francisco, "Frisco" as Donald called it.

Once in San Francisco, Donald remembers, he and Robert went down to the Fillmore district and hung out. Later that night, they went to a joint called Vesuvio's in North Beach. They went in, and about a half-an-hour later, Bob began performing. The crowd grew to 400 people. The word had gotten out that Robert was in town. That, Donald recalls, was the first time he had any idea of who his brother was. Donald, although he knew that Robert always wrote and recited, was fascinated and surprised that all of these people knew and revered his brother that way. What Donald was describing was a night he and his brother experienced in 1953; but by the reception he received, Bob Kaufman had visited the Bay Area some time prior and had earned a reputation already.

On a more personal note, Donald recalls that in spite of his notoriety, Robert "didn't want to be bothered with nobody." When Robert wanted to get away, out of North Beach, he escaped to Port Street to their sister Olivia's house; it was Bob's hideout,

according to Donald.

During the years 1958, through 1960 in San Francisco, Bob Kaufman had two Black male friends, an older poet named Jimmy Carter, and a Jazz flautist and drummer, Elouard Burt (Burt 8/13/97). Elouard, also born and raised in New Orleans, was discharged from the Air Force in 1958. He first met Bob Kaufman in the Co-Existence Bagel shop on Grant Avenue and Green. According to Burt, Bob's performances were preceded by an older Black poet named Alex, a tall, dignified man, who held court early. Bob would come in around four or five o'clock in the evening and entertain audiences. At the time, Burt was playing flutes and conga drums; he and Kaufman spoke of New Orleans, but Bob did most of the talking. Burt says they drank wine and smoked a little grass. Burt liked to hear Bob read and create, and Burt played drums for him at Aquatic Park into the wee hours. They became close in this creative blending. They never really worked together, just jammed. Burt says Bob was outrageous, sometimes vulgar, and insulting to white poets, who he thought stole from him. In those days, Burt recalls that Bob was angry. At the time, Burt says, they spoke of being ignored by white Beat poets, and complained the white poets were getting gigs at clubs, and invited and paid to read at coffee shops; while the Black poets who held the crowds and had a lot more going on would not get paid. Bob was an instigator then, and he was quick to start a commotion Burt recalls.

Their friend, Jimmy Carter, was constantly reading and writing poetry, but he did not want to publish it (Burt). If Bob started a commotion, Burt remembers, Jimmy would join in and knock someone out. According to Elouard, Jimmy Carter was the son

of a Black dentist in the Crescent City, and he was a 1927 graduate of UCLA.<sup>27</sup> Of the three of them, Jimmy was the oldest and the loudest, Burt reports. The trio would wind up at Elouard's house at two or three o'clock in the morning (Burt). They would eat oatmeal with raisins and apples, then get drunk again. They also created together at Aquatic Park. Burt would play drums; they'd all write. The rhythm was inspiration, Burt remembers, and they loved playing privately on the beach, digging the beauty. Also at the time, their other pardner, whom Burt calls the missing link, was Joe Overstreet. He was a practical joker who lived in Richmond at the time; later, he moved to New York to the lower East Side.

In Burt's estimation, both Bob and Jimmy were selfish then. Jimmy was the old man, super intelligent; it didn't matter what was going on in the Bagel shop, a crowd of people or not; when he came in, he would just start reading out loud, doing some outrageous and vulgar verse. No one disagreed with him or told him to shut up, Burt remembers. Jimmy and Bob would write and discuss their work over morning oatmeal, later both would perform without reading from a script. Jimmy felt he didn't get his due, so he stayed angry, Burt says. But Jimmy didn't take advantage of his opportunities. On one occasion, Burt remembers someone from the *New York Times* came around to interview Bob and Jimmy. Jimmy declined and Bob agreed, Burt recalls.

Elouard Burt remembers Eileen Kaufman was always around, and she and Bob were inseparable, except at night, when Bob did the man thing at Burt's place; he and his buddies wouldn't allow women on their scene. Burt says that with women around, there couldn't have been the male boasting that took place. Without women around, they could

be real, lowdown, or whatever. Burt says there were no Black women in their circles at the time, but white women were fans in droves. Throughout the crucial Beat years, America operated under a violent and unforgiving Jim Crow police state, but these Black beats lived in integrated artistic communities from San Francisco to New York, from the U.S. to Mexico and beyond. With their Blackness as their foundation, they sought to express and live their freedom, and to create art on their own terms. All three Black Beats—Kaufman, Joans, and Jones-- participated in interracial relationships in and out of marriage, and all three were intimate friends with Beat principals Ginsberg, Kerouac, Corso, Ferlinghetti, Michael McClure, and others.

Bob was constantly writing in those days, and Eileen was always there, collecting his work, going behind him and saving it for him (Burt). He was distracted but producing, doing new work; Burt remembers how faithful Eileen was then. He remembers Eileen Kaufman as completely submissive, that she had an inner understanding of Bob, and often took his verbal abuse that sometimes came after a few glasses of wine. They would all go to the park in the early hours before day in the morning (Burt). Burt had a log drum; it roared, and that produced a special sound, which inspired Bob. In these sessions, Bob would write on anything he could find, paper bags, napkins; if he had a pad, it was full (Burt). Often, after their sessions, Bob would take his writing home, and Eileen would type for him, putting his words down in a presentable manner (Burt). Burt credits Eileen for the hard work of collecting the material for Bob's first collection, *Solitudes*.

San Francisco is not a large place, but North Beach and the Fillmore were miles



apart in some ways. Burt recalls that these were the days that Johnny Mathis was gaining recognition. Lenny Tristano, a fine piano player, was looking to make a hit, and the three Montgomery Brothers,<sup>28</sup> were working at clubs when Burt was there (Formento 20). “Bob City was over in the Fillmore District where Milt Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, and all those kind of people hung out:” The only other Black woman on the scene Burt remembers was Eartha Kitt, who was playing one of the rooms in the Fairmont Hotel when Burt played there.

The Black artists were all part of a whole inspiration. The few Black poets felt that there weren’t many Blacks in North Beach. Blacks were in Fillmore, not in the Beach. North Beach was strictly Italian. The few Black men there in the Beach then were writers, musicians, seamen, or former seamen, like Bob Kaufman and Jimmy Carter. There was never a feeling of not being welcome, not a bad racial thing at all; if there had been, the first to be put out would have been Jimmy and Bob because they could be highly insulting to everybody. In 1958, they were handled with kid gloves and respect. It was because of the art. Bob could go anywhere and read. In fact, he seldom went to the Fillmore district. Bob didn’t want to leave the Beach. Jimmy was worse than Bob. He would taunt the police and tell them to kiss his Black ass. At the time, Ginsberg was getting a lot of press, but Bob and Jimmy had an entourage of white women, even when they were jailed. So for the most part, the police then were polite because they didn’t want any incidents with these young white women who followed Jimmy and Bob club to club. Where ever Bob was, at the Bagel Shop or the Tea Room across the street, the crowds followed, spent money, so even the shop keepers didn’t complain about any outrageous behavior; Bob and paying customers were good for business, and Bob performed for them (Burt).

Burt says that Bob loved the sax, and there were plenty of sax players on the Beach. Bob told Burt to listen to his poetry and watch him growl (like a sax); he was playing his horn. This is interesting since Bob’s widow Eileen insists that if Bob would have played an instrument, it would have been a guitar; in fact, the guitar is the image she chose for the title of his posthumously published poems, *Cranial Guitar*.

The three of them, Jimmy, Burt, and Bob held that New Orleans connection. They loved to eat New Orleans style. Burt says that cooking was his therapy, and he'd cook for the whole week. He would make a pot of Red Beans, while Jimmy would do some succotash with a bit of okra. These three friends didn't even have to call each other; they knew Burt cooked on Friday for the week. This bound them together; and if they came, there was a feast. Their noses would get them into trouble. Burt says they would get together, cook the food, eat and drink, talking all night.

When they were out together, they'd sit at a bar, have a drink, and Jimmy would look for a conversation, while Bob could never remain quiet; he'd hold court on any topic. Bob and Jimmy liked to mess with people in a playful way; but sometimes, according to Burt, it got out of hand amounting to abusive taunting. Perhaps intellectual dozens might be a comprehensive term for what they did. If the dozens was verbal dueling, add sarcastic jabs, intellectual probing, and downright taunting to it; after a few drinks, the verbal fight was on for Bob and Jimmy. Perhaps it was this kind of verbal jabbing Bob used that offended police when they came on the poetry scene.

From the recollections of Eileen Kaufman, David Henderson, Barbara Christian, Elouard Burt, Joyce Perkins, and Donald Kaufman, former classmates, some generalities can be made. Bob Kaufman was a man full of enthusiasm and creative energy; he moved everyone he touched. He was quick witted, easygoing, but sometimes very self absorbed. He loved art, music, being in harmony, and having fun. He had an easygoing nature and a sincere love for life. He liked to jump into things, many things at a time, and perhaps not giving all a full commitment; he had other fish to fry. While he liked to stay in the

spotlight, he often reacted to others in a shy and reserved manner, as he did when we met in San Francisco in the early 1980s (see Preface). He was sensitive and gracious, independent minded, and happy with himself. Usually, Bob Kaufman had an easy ability with others, could be diplomatic, and made friends easily. He was good looking, creative, and artistic, affectionate, and possessed dynamic personal magnetism. Just ask anyone who knew him. He loved his fellow man, white, Black, brown, yellow, red; it didn't matter. He worked well in partnerships, and provided the glue for *Beatitude* in its early days. He was personally extravagant and self indulgent, with a penchant for good food, alcohol, and drugs, like many of his generation. An excellent communicator and conversationalist, Bob was charming, understanding, and loving to his family. Family was always important to him, and he was close to both parents and had a deep love for his siblings, his wife and his children.

On the other hand, Kaufman's intensely active mind allowed him to voice many original ideas at will; he was well read, knowledgeable. He was impulsive. He could be impatient with people and himself, making him good at beginning projects, but not at completing them. His sharp wit, mental energy, and fluency in speech and writing often stunned people, and his eidetic memory aided his intelligence. But his gift perhaps overwhelmed him. He explained things as a teacher, but became pointed, critically and painfully blunt when he wanted; in this way, some of his altercations with North Beach police were self instigated.

According to Eileen, Bob Kaufman was very romantic and gentle, but not very practical, which is what she provided him. He loved very deeply, Eileen feels.

Sometimes, he delighted in crowds, but he was also introspective and a loner, especially in his later years. Because of his impractical nature, he had difficulty managing the many details of life and both Eileen Kaufman and Lynne Wildey helped and supported his drive.

**Eileen Kaufman, the Keeper of the Flame.** Bob Kaufman's second wife, Eileen Kaufman, whom he met in 1957, is affectionately referred to as "the keeper of the flame" for her tender care of Bob Kaufman's writing, for her aid in helping to get his work into print, for her sincerity as a helpmate, and her enthusiasm for his genius. Eileen remembers Bob as a wholly romantic soul who was gentle, challenging, and profound (1996). He seemed to know everything. He courted her in his way, and she loved it (E. Kaufman). To Eileen, Bob was always quite special.

In telling of her life, Eileen recounts that she was originally from Florida and was the daughter of her father's mistress. When Eileen was six months old, her father's wife, Alicia, came to take her to Minnesota; during the trip, Eileen caught pneumonia. She never felt close to her step mom, and sensed that she only wanted to take her to Minnesota to force Eileen's date to come back to her. At nine years old, Eileen traveled alone to meet her real mom, Sandy.

She remembers her father as a generous man who sent her a piano, which she played at seven. Her father also gave her an encyclopedia of music containing all operas and composers. The result was that Eileen learned to read music at a young age and loved to sing and play the piano. She studied and sang opera at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music.

It was when she was making a living writing ad copy for Hollis Department Store

that she met Bob Kaufman. He was friends with Tom Albright, the Art Critic at the *San Francisco Chronicle* at the time, and they loved to do peyote then. Together, Albright and Eileen rented an apartment and sublet to a painter, Joe Overstreet. One night, when she stayed over, about 4 a.m. or 5, they heard this hoarse voice shouting.

“I need a cup of coffee, and I don’t have a dime.”

Joe Overstreet came out, and said that “somebody get Bob Kaufman a cup of coffee for God’s sake, so we can all get some sleep.”

Eileen says she put on her poncho, went to the door, told him ok, that they could run down the hill. They began a conversation that Eileen suggests never ended until Bob’s death in 1986.

The founding of *Beatitude* and the birth of their son, Parker, made 1959 a memorable year for Bob and Eileen. Their son, named for Charlie “Bird” Parker, was a big blessing for them. Bob’s sister Joyce remembers that Parker was a beautiful child who spent time at their brother George’s home in Oakland. Parker was like one of George’s kids, with cousins who were like sisters and brothers. While Joyce believes that Bob and Eileen’s many travels took their toll on Parker, and by some standards, his childhood might not be thought of as stable. But he was well loved by all, and Bob and Eileen adored him. The last time Joyce saw Parker was on her trip to San Francisco at her sister Olivia’s house. Parker told aunt Joyce that he had not visited New Orleans, and suggested he wanted to do so. Joyce asked him when was he coming? She insisted to him that he would always be welcome. When Joyce and her husband visited Olivia in San Francisco, Bob came over, and his first word was “Joycie? Is that you Joycie?”

1959 also brought challenges, as Bob was jailed thirty-five times or more. The police were always arresting him, and their friends were always getting him out. We may be horrified at viewing the video of police beating Rodney King on the road; but remembering those Beat days, Eileen Kaufman recounts how the police would stop the elevator between floors to beat Bob. David Henderson's Introduction to *Cranial Guitar* details the main culprit of those arrests, a policeman named Biggerini (13). According to Henderson, Biggerini was a bully by nature, hated the Beats, and was more easily able to pick on Bob because he was the Black Beat reading in white clubs among white Beatniks (a bad word then); most importantly, Bob had a faithful following of white women, which was taboo during Jim Crow 1950s. According to Burt, Black man with a white woman angered cops more than anything. Eileen Kaufman and Allen Ginsberg report that there was always a collection to get Bob out of jail. Some say he dared the cops, while others say the cops picked on him.

Eileen Kaufman helped in the founding of *Beatitude*. Issue Number 1 was published in 1959 from San Francisco's North Beach, selling at 25 cents a copy. Co-founded by Bob Kaufman, Allen Ginsberg, William J. Margolis, and John Kelly. *Beatitude* was the only cooperative journal during the beat era. 1959 also rang in the success of Bob Kaufman's broadsides, *Does the Secret Mind Whisper*, and *Second April*, both published by City Lights.

Bob Kaufman returned to New York around 1960 or 61, as David Henderson's Introduction to *Cranial Guitar* reveals. His reputation had spread rapidly because of his appearances in two films: Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief* (1959), and Kenneth Tynen's

*Dissent in the Arts in America*. The latter was banned but won the Italian Spoleto Film Festival first place award in 1960. The popularity of Bob's poem, "*Abomunist Manifesto*," according to Maria Damon rivaled Ginsberg's *Howl* in its status as a signature text" (Damon, *Callaloo* 105).

But familiar problems beset Kaufman in New York too. Eileen recalls in late 1960 that while trespassing on the grass in Washington Square Park, Bob was harassed by police and placed in Bellevue hospital's psychiatric ward where he received electro shock treatments. These treatments took a toll on Bob physically and psychologically, and he was never the same. This incident broke his belief in people, soured him some, and initiated an introspective period. He drank a lot, and was out of it much of the time.

On November 22, 1963, Bob and Eileen were watching television when the thirty-fifth President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Just as the nation was in shock, Bob Kaufman took this event particularly hard. On this day, Kaufman took a Buddhist vow of silence, which lasted until the Viet Nam war ended. Many people on both coasts tell odd anecdotes regarding this period of Bob's life. Some say that he was not really silent, that he asked for a drink, drugs, or something to eat. Others say that he did not speak. Eileen insists that the assassination was such a shock for Bob because he felt the democratic ideal itself had been killed, and with it hope. His response was to turn inward, to become silent in the Buddhist way. A chief tenant of Zen Buddhism<sup>29</sup> is that "the way to peace lies through peace; we must develop peace within ourselves if we hope to establish peace in the world" (Thien-An 61). If law and a sense of justice were not working, then outward anger would not be productive for

Kaufman; he had to empty his mind of much of what was disturbing in the world in order to still himself, to make his inner peace and to better the world.

Like his Beat contemporaries, Bob Kaufman was attracted to Zen Buddhist ideals. It served the beat-up platform suggested by Kerouac and others. According to Alan Watts, Zen served “the younger generation’s non- participation in ‘The American Way of Life,’ a revolt which does not seek to change the existing order but simply turns away from it to find the significance of life in subjective experience rather than objective achievement” (344). It is no wonder that Bob Kaufman “cut out” of the terrible way life was going. He spent an entire decade rejecting the outward world and turning inward to find peace. It was this period of silence that helped to promote classification of Kaufman as “courting a certain poetic anonymity more arduously than fame as a poet” (Lindberg 166). Since he had dropped off of the poetry scene for a decade, many people thought him dead.

According to Ishmael Reed, Bob Kaufman was in his silent mode for most of his New York City period. Kaufman sometimes slept on the floor in Reed’s apartment. Reed remembers going to work at the unemployment office on 6<sup>th</sup> Street during this time. Bob would show up when Reed was ready to leave for work, and Reed allowed him to sleep there during the day. Reed was in his early 20s at the time. This was after the Umbra workshops were in full thunder, but Bob remained silent during most of the turbulent 60s. He only began speaking again in January 1973, the official end of the Vietnam war.

Divorced and separated for some time, Bob and Eileen remarried on September 6, 1976 atop Mt. Tamalpais on Bolinas Ridge, Marin, California. It was a romantic



ceremony. Eileen said one of their favorite walks was to the top of the Mountain. Bob Kaufman walked every day, Eileen remembers. Bad weather or pressing commitments could stop him; he walked, thought, talked, and walked, but mostly thought and walked, she says. She was always trying to keep up with his pace.

At some point, Eileen and Bob once again lost touch and separated. On his own, living from pillar to post, crashing where friends let him, and his health failing, this was a difficult time for Bob Kaufman. His relationship with Eileen had failed; he was lonely. Then, at the end of the 70s, his apartment caught fire. Fortunately, Raymond Foye, a former assistant to Lawrence Ferlinghetti at City Lights Books, salvaged Bob's manuscript from the badly burned apartment. That manuscript became the collection *The Ancient Rain*. Foye also assisted Bob in getting an NEA fellowship. Back in San Francisco, Kaufman wandered the North Beach streets, still making poetry, but he was weakened by advancing emphysema and living catch as catch can. After *Ancient Rain* was published, and the money from his National Endowment fellowship was spent, Kaufman's friends came to his aid often. Poet Q. R. Hand paid for a much needed pair of glasses and a hearing aid for Bob. He was visibly weak, and shaking with symptoms of Parkinson's disease. He could still communicate, however, and manage to impress a crowd at the 1984 Poets for Peace reading organized by Herman Berlandt at Fort Mason Center in San Francisco.

The last time I saw Bob Kaufman was at the San Francisco Historical and Cultural Society in 1985, when poet Naomi Long Madgett had come for a mini-residency and public reading. Bob was with the poet Lynne Wildey, who was associated with Robert

Duncan and the New School in San Francisco. Lynne was thin, pretty, with long blond wavy hair. She and Bob Kaufman were inseparable during the last five years of his life. At the Historical and Cultural Society reading, Kaufman thanked Naomi for publishing a poem of his some time ago, a Lotus press broadside that was part of a series on Black poetry. Conyus Calhoun, the former Poetry Editor for *The Black Scholar*, was there, and he, Bob, and Naomi had a touching reunion. Kaufman spoke in a squeaky whisper, and everyone held onto each word.

**But, he also took drugs.** The Beat years were an unusual time. In the aftermath of the war, there were large numbers of homeless men in both San Francisco and New York—some of whom were injured severely from combat, both physically and psychologically. There was still Jim Crow, “the Negro problem,” yet the suburb explosion signaled a new prosperity, as modern conveniences in the home ushered in a new consumerism. There was also the excitement of the new music called Jazz, particularly Bebop. In his memoir, *To Be or Not to Bop*, Dizzy Gillespie calls America’s embrace of the musicians’ lifestyles and language the cult of Beboppers, claiming it resulted from the “jive-ass stories about ‘beboppers’ circulating in the news” (278). While Gillespie expresses happiness about the publicity, he laments that the press turned them into “weird” stereotypes, exploiting every weakness (278). Gillespie explains that “Once it got inside the marketplace, our style was subverted by the press and music industry” (279). This attention was as negative as it was positive. Some of the heroes of this new music, like Parker, helped to foster the romantic notion of getting high. In Parker’s case, he was a junkie, and this was widely known. Billy Holiday’s heroin habit was too, and police and

press alike started to label all musicians as addicts. In his book *The Jazz Life*, Nat Hentoff addresses the use of drugs by Jazz musicians in a chapter entitled simply “Junk.” Quite simply, he says:

I don’t know exactly how many jazz musicians are now or have been addicted to narcotics. Nor does anyone else. There has been surprisingly little research in the field as a whole; and except for the work of psychologist Charles Winick, practically no systematic study has been made of jazz addicts. (75)

Jazz musicians and their habits were the inspiration for much of the Beat poets’ language and lifestyles. Around the San Francisco Bay Area, many poets and Beat fans relay anecdotes of Bob Kaufman high as a kite asking for “a hit of something,” supposedly some kind of drug. No one knows how these rumors begin, but they are highly exaggerated. Of course Bob Kaufman did drugs, but mostly marijuana, occasionally, he might do some speed, peyote and what may have been available at the time with friends. Kaufman said, “six gentlemen and I, Frank, Diane, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, . . . we got loaded together. . . . We lived in Carmel on the main street” (tape dated 8/29/1976).<sup>30</sup> While these practices were common in his circle, many of the Beats experimented with drugs to achieve a “transcendental” experience, especially drugs that delivered hallucinogenic qualities like peyote and mushrooms. Of course, the goal of “altered states of consciousness” and “experiencing nothingness” was a Buddhist goal, another shared goal; but the popular and dangerous rush toward a quick road to higher understanding through drugs was artificial.<sup>31</sup> This belief continued through the “flower power generation” following. Drugs were recreational but never essential for Bob Kaufman, and were not the source of his hip-ness or muse. Besides, rampant drug use

was more rare. Dizzy Gillespie reports this more specifically.

The drug scourge of the forties victimized black musicians first, before hitting any other large segment of the black community. But if a cat has his head together, nothing like that, requiring his own indulgence, could've stopped him. I've always believed that. I knew several guys that were real hip, musically, and hip about life who never got high. Getting high wasn't one of the prerequisites for being hip, and to say it was would be inaccurate. (Gillespie 284)

This statement applies to Bob Kaufman. His mid-50s poetry readings through the 60s, his brilliant long poems, his total output equal a sustained contribution. This would not be possible for someone totally hooked or strung out on hard drugs as a purpose.<sup>32</sup>

Also, Kaufman's drugs of choice were always booze, cigarettes, and marijuana. He drank socially, and no more than anyone else. Yes, he could tie one on with the best of his Beat buddies, and enjoyed escaping in artificial euphoria from time to time. Many of the Beat principals did the same thing.<sup>33</sup> In this, Kaufman was no exception.

Hentoff clearly states about the working musicians how the lifestyle encouraged some excesses due to availability and environment.

The first excess generally attributed to jazzman was a heavy dependence on liquor. Like the doctor and drugs, the musician works in places where liquor is immediately accessible. There were heavy drinkers among the early players, . . . The hours are long, careers are erratic, and if a man has a psychological and/or physiological propensity to dink, the jazz life provides the set-up he needs. While there is some mythology that marijuana and heroin clarify one's playing, even the lushes agree that too much liquor can only lead to clinkers. (76-77)

Like these working musicians environments, the San Francisco cafés of North Beach often served drinks as well as coffee, tea, and food. Poetry readings drew crowds; and in Bob Kaufman's case, as was the case with popular musicians, fans "sent" him drinks, encouraging him to continue to perform, and many times he did. In those days, it

was probably the alcohol which caused the outrageous behavior for which he became famous and infamous; after all, alcohol, diminishes inhibitions. His last days were spent fighting the effects of emphysema. He smoked cigarettes most of his adult life.

**Not Queer.** Bob Kaufman was into women, and women were into him.

According to his brother Donald, he was not gay. His reference to his grandfather as “Queer” in the poem, “Grandfather was Queer, Too,” refers to their lineage as Black and Jewish, an unusual match, that went against the grain. In the same manner, while Bob Kaufman had affection for his friend Allen Ginsberg, it was an appreciation for Ginsberg’s originality, his “queer ” and unaccepted lifestyle, the ancestry they shared, and their love for Jazz and poetry. Being gay and Jewish made Ginsberg as marginal as Kaufman; both had to survive the backlash of conservative America.

For the most part, Bob Kaufman was a reader, writer, husband, father, friend, Buddhist, and believer in life. There were times when he was worn down from his unfortunate experiences, but he was not a drug addict. If anything, he smoked too much, was around too much smoke, and it was the effects of all that smoke that caused the emphysema which killed him.

### Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion of *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*

*When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses, for art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgement.*

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

In this chapter, we begin the task of interpreting Bob Kaufman's verse with the first collection *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness* (New Directions 1959), which is still in print. In analyzing this premier collection, where his poems appear in three sections, we will discuss the predominant themes, and suggest that Bob Kaufman's Jazz poems offers new developments in the treatment of Jazz as a creative idiom. In addition, the lyrical quality of his verse will be shown as revealing a soul in isolation and melancholy, expressing deep disappointment with modern life, as well as searching for approaches that can facilitate understanding of what has occurred. The sequence, "Jail Poems," receives particular attention, and a lengthy linguistic discussion of the "Abomunist Manifesto" poems reveals Kaufman's prowess with language.

The close readings of shorter poems are classified into groups: melancholy lyrics, quasi-narratives which are surreal, Praise Poems, Jazz Poems, Southern Poems, the longer Jail Poems, and finally Kaufman's Lexicon: "Abomunist Manifesto."

As noted earlier, many critics and fans mention Kaufman's oral performances. Lorenzo Thomas explains that "Bob Kaufman exemplifies the Beat commitment to an oral poetry. Capable of extemporizing astonishing poems, he not only memorized his own compositions but was fond of reciting the works of Federico Garcia Lorca and other poets at length, . . . he was an electrifying performer even in his declining years" (199-200). Even today, if poets wish to be read, performing is a way to reach a larger audience. For Bob Kaufman, performing was central to sharing poetry, but the fact remains that Bob Kaufman wrote his poems. This, his first collection, *Solitudes*, is a fine testimony to the artful verse he created. This is the real Bob Kaufman whom Chicano poet Raul Salinas calls forth:

Will the real Mr. Kaufman  
please come to the counter. . . . (191)

**Melancholy Lyrics.** The real Bob Kaufman speaks through these verses, between lyrics that are intensely personal and some that directly address the inequalities in society. A particularly lyrical poem, "I Have Folded My Sorrows," opens the collection, and epitomizes the angst of the Beat and modern era. "I Have Folded My Sorrows" begins in a resonant metaphor.

I have folded my sorrows into the mantle of summer night,  
Assigning each brief storm its allotted space in time,  
Quietly pursuing catastrophic histories buried in my eyes. (1-3)

Here is the voice of a human being aching from sorrow, a sorrow so fixed it becomes a thing as familiar as a cloth one folds. One may suggest that in this case, it is not only a mantle; the sorrows are folded into the mantle that is the meditative melancholy

of night. The poem then expands the clothing metaphor.

Blues come dressed like introspective echoes of a journey. (9)

“The Blues” is a good feeling gone bad. Since the blues are dressed, the sorrows folded, convey the weight of sorrows and the blues, sadnesses so familiar that they are like the clothes one wears daily. It is this dense layering of meaning within a few words that become the hallmark of Bob Kaufman’s poetry. While his poems vary, they are brimming with insight into the human condition. The voice here declares the resignation of the poet, as he revisits a personal past of moments and opportunities that perhaps were overlooked, so much so that they brought on this internal journey. Somehow the persona castigates, beats himself for spilled milk, what the poet calls “those unfinished encounters./ Still they remain unfinished.” This is what humans do. Their imagination turns inward as they are haunted by unfulfilled desires. The poem continues:

And yes, I have at times wished myself something different. (12)

The final two lines remind us of the life of Bob Kaufman, and hint at some of those legendary tales, and sometimes self-promoted myths.

The tragedies are sung nightly at the funerals of the poet;

the revisited soul is wrapped in the aura of familiarity. (8-9)

As his biography reveals, Bob Kaufman was indeed “wrapped in the aura of familiarity” by his public, who swapped tales of his experiences, recited his verse, and shook their our heads in affirmation.

These lines may also refer to the opening scene of Hamlet. Hamlet’s father appears as a ghost, a “revisited soul . . . wrapped in the aura of familiarity.” Like the



young Hamlet, the persona grieves a wronged past, those pains of yesterday. Those “catastrophic histories,” buried within him, emerged in his eyes, then spread all around him, like clothing. How then will one move and live under such weight? Only the poems will tell us. This persona is burdened by the weight of this knowledge, what is already past and can not be undone, and what remains unfinished. This is the Beat era reasoning for wanting distance from the superficial middle-class existence where everything is spit-shined and happy. The Beats, including Kaufman, understood the veneer of American life the true cost of it. Those “catastrophic histories” are ever present for the intellectual. These poems are written to comfort the afflicted and upset the comfortable,<sup>34</sup> a poet’s goal.

In the second such lyric, entitled “Would You Wear My Eyes,” the tone also expresses a huge sadness. The poem opens with a “beat” up body.

My body is a torn mattress,  
Disheveled throbbing place  
For the comings and goings  
Of loveless transients.  
The whole of me  
Is an unfinished room . . . (1-6)

In this poem, the persona, unhappy with life, is so beat up that his chosen metaphor paints a grim portrait, the “torn mattress” of a body, one that is unkempt, and throbbing, put upon by the weight of those “comings and goings/ Of loveless transients.” This persona is reflecting, yet addresses the reader matter-of-factly about pressures, hardships, debilitating stress, and the resulting emptiness. The present state of affairs here is a depressed mood. Things are so bad that the persona is desperate enough to inflict harm.

I have shot myself with my eyes  
but death refused my advances. (10-11)

This sadness is for more than the individual self. This depression is the result of helplessness due to the “Long-forgotten Indian tribes” who “fight battles on the chest.” The weight is a personal and historical weight. Things in this life are quite far out of wack. The persona is so bad off that there are “sunken ships rotting” in his stomach. This is oppression of a historic nature, pointing to the injustices America inflicted on its Native Peoples, its human cargo from the Middle Passage, the millions lost. This is an ancient ache, and the persona’s awareness of it proves crippling.

This speaker’s suicidal melancholy is systemic for the persona, who is so afraid and won’t “go out anymore.” Would any of us really want to live in those eyes? These eyes cleverly reveal the catastrophes of this life. The question raised is philosophical and meant to push the reader to think.

Expanding the frame of reference, the persona laments that his “face is covered with maps of dead nations” (16); he has “walked on my walls each night/ Through strange landscapes in my head” (12-13). The images in the head of this speaker are crushing, as the weight of “dead nations” of those “Long-forgotten Indian tribes fight battles” on his chest fuel the surreal landscapes of his mind. Then in a curious two lines, the speaker recalls a more personal loss.

My legs are charred remains of burned cypress trees,  
My feet are covered with moss from bayous, flowing  
across my floor. (23-25)

The landscape here is semi-autobiographical, recalling the place of Bob Kaufman’s birth, the deep south, where cypress trees outlasted the old south. Cypress

trees are those large trunk trees growing out of the swamp; it is a wood that does not rot, and even termites won't eat it. In line 23, the speaker's legs are charred remains of burned cypress; this is an unnatural demolition. He is burned, irreparably hurt, but still alive. Even a damaged or burned cypress tree, what is visible above water or ground, may have a stump as thick as 30 feet underground.<sup>35</sup> The durability of cypress is responsible for those hundred-year-old southern mansions still standing, and southerners are aware of this fact. Perhaps like the formidable cypress stump, there is still a lot of this persona one can not see. In the next line, his feet are covered with moss like those old broken and burnt trees, the trunks of which still stand in bayous; these broken vestiges are what remain on the poet's floor. Spanish moss may not look like much to the naked eye, but it is actually a tropical herb.<sup>36</sup> It was lines like these that first led me to notice the southern upbringing of Bob Kaufman. The melancholy expressed here is both public and private, outside in the larger world, but close and as personal as his southern roots. The images of moss and enduring cypress are part of the persona's mystery. Kaufman returns to the southern landscape in only a few poems, but images such as these are sprinkled throughout his work.

The depth and originality of the imagery is Surreal. The speaker's voice is quiet, but what a message. The weight of past damage to the human spirit takes a terrible toll. In this way, the Surreal provides the wail of a trumpet solo in Jazz. The persona is telling a horrible truth, lest the reader forget it. This poem was so loved universally in the Bay Area, that after his passing, Jack Hirschman edited a collection of elegies entitled like the poem, *Would You Wear My Eyes? A Tribute to Bob Kaufman*; it was published by The

Bob Kaufman Collective in 1989.

These melancholy reminiscences place Kaufman within the Beat fabric of concerns. The Beats looked inward because the world in which they lived was wrought with the anxiety of affluence. The Beats were not concerned with melting into the middle class ideal; for them, life had to be more than owning the latest toaster oven. Their anxiety was relieved when they turned away from the empty social standard. It was as though the public consciousness was fake to them, and the inner consciousness, creativity in all its forms was what mattered to them. The Beats were people with personal tragedies, new encounters, and a desire to tread new cultural ground. They looked to eastern thought, to philosophy for answers regarding true fulfillment. The Beats were students of self-analysis and self-realization.

**Quasi-narratives (surreal).** Kaufman's 51 early poems, written over a period of years are mainly lyrics, and many use a surreal approach to translate experience, each in unique ways. Often, Kaufman creates a quasi-narrative, lyrics couched in a surreal narrative. That is, by its surreal nature, the telling bares a narrative quality, but is not linear; since rather than a logical time line, readers get a surreal juxtaposing of past and present, a quality characteristic of all Kaufman's collections. Some poems that illustrate this form are: "Afterwards, They Shall Dance;" "Benediction;" "West Coast Sounds" (which is also about Jazz music); and "Grandfather Was Queer, Too. "

In the poem, "Afterwards, They Shall Dance," the speaker begins telling a story about what is going on in the city by the Bay, San Francisco, deep in Beat land.

In the city of St. Francis they have taken down the statue of  
St. Francis

And the hummingbirds all fly forward to protest, humming  
feather poems. (1-2)

Dismissing St. Francis is especially offensive in his city; rejecting his saint-like  
soul is a travesty of dishonorable proportions. The sweet humming birds, nature's poets,  
protest, and only surreal images can relieve the stress. From Bodenheim to Dylan to Poor  
Edgar Allen Poe, something is amiss.

Bodenheim denounced everyone and wrote. Bodenheim had  
no sweet marijuana dreams.

Patriotic mescateleer, did not die seriously, no poet love to  
end with, gone. (5-8)

The geniuses are also gone for one reason or another, some kind of death, no  
pleasure, killed in the translation. These are Kaufman's genius heroes. Maxwell  
Bodenheim was the one-time Bohemian poet of the Village in lower Manhattan. The  
story goes that at 62, homeless, in the dead cold, he and his wife sought shelter at the  
apartment of a dishwasher who had the hots for his young wife (Bisbort screen 1).  
Catching them in an amorous moment and interfering, the older poet was overpowered,  
shot twice, and died instantly. The hysterical wife, too, died, stabbed by the dishwasher in  
the back four times (Bisbort screen 1). Already quite a loner, Bodenheim's life was cut  
short, with no more sweet times ahead. Yet, Kaufman says he was a "patriotic  
mescateler," which is a humorous twist, this image of a man faithful to tequila liquor; then  
in all seriousness, in the same line we find a more biographical reference; he "did not die  
seriously, no poet love to end with, gone." Bodenheim was fond of liquor, and this

misspelling of mescatel for mezcal is not uncommon with Kaufman. Mezcal is a liquor made from agave, and tequila is a grade of mezcal. Here we witness Kaufman's vast store of knowledge seeping through the lines.

Then there are allusions to the other genius poets, Dylan Thomas and Edgar Allen Poe.

Dylan took the stone cat's nap at St. Vincent's, vaticaned  
beer, no defense; . . . (8-10)

Like Bodenheim, Thomas was a heavy drinker who died tragically in New York City from alcoholism, or what Kaufman calls holy beer, or "vaticaned beer" at 39. Thomas, too, was legendary for his work and his fully-lived life. Thomas took his own advice as his famous villanelle suggests.

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

There is no defense against such a life. A similar fate fell to the famous Billie Holiday, the Jazz singer; Kaufman states she's "lost on the subway and stayed there/ forever." Death seems the only fate for such geniuses such as these, yet redemption for the living exists in the form of their work, what the persona calls "Raised little peace-of-mind gardens in and out of the way/ stations." Holiday's songs and her voice are like pieces of mind one can visit again and again. There is hope and challenge here, since the work of Billie Holiday "will go on living in wrappers of jazz silence forever, / loved." Her art continues and is loved. Her contributions in Jazz music are as fine an art as that of

Thomas, as Bodenheim, as Poe. Jazz is great art in this singer and song writer. This is why in spite of all the grim news the speaker presents, the hope lies in the art which lives and is loved. In his seminal *Understanding The New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References*, Stephen Henderson calls this reference to Black music as a poetic reference an essential feature of Black poetry (31).

Still, the persona in Kaufman's poem carries the weight of the loss of these geniuses, and the horror of death weighs on this speaker.

My face feels like a living emotional relief map, forever wet. . . . (9)

All faces possess depth, dimension, but these features are weathered and sobbing, perhaps worn as water wears on stone. Then, the persona recalls the another lost genius poet and writer.

Poor Edgar Allan Poe died translated, in unpressed pants, . . . (23)

Like Bodenheim and Thomas, Poe was active in the literary life, loved drink, struggled to make it, and also met an untimely death. In Poe's case, for Kaufman's persona, the poet died, but "died translated," somehow a terrible fate, not to be understood, and misrepresented as in "unpressed pants." This may refer to the fact that the French translated Poe and made him a literary God, yet America didn't rate him that high until more recently. Kaufman's images possess a surreal logic. These are figurative suggestions which are powerfully compressed, clever, and say so much in so few words, the hallmark of a fine poet.

Finally, the persona's voice is human and confesses to the human right to breathe,

literally his fair share of air, everyone's right.

Whether I am a poet or not, I use fifty dollars' worth  
of air every day, cool. (15)

The poet/ speaker is just a human being, living, breathing air every day; and in the slightest Black vernacular, this is "cool," which is very good. Here Bob Kaufman evokes the language of Black speech as Black musicians of his day used the word "cool," a reference which appears early in the work of Langston Hughes, and reappears in many Beat poets' work from Ginsberg to Corso.

Unfortunately for this speaker, "In order to exist," we are told that he has to "hide behind stacks of red and blue poems... singing... drinking cool beatitudes." Poetry is the savior for what ails human kind. This Beat ideal, "drinking cool beatitudes," speaks to the refreshing nature of the Black vernacular, the blessings of poetry, and the state of being relieved as a result.

The Kaufman poem "Benediction" is brief, like a true benediction. In the Roman Catholic practice, the benediction is "the invocation of a blessing, especially the short blessing with which public worship is concluded" and it is "an expression of good wishes" (*Merriam* 106). The difference in this poem is that we visit the political, rather than the religious awareness of Bob Kaufman; his is a social mission in verse. It is in this effort at raising the consciousness level of his audience that Bob Kaufman prefigures the Black Arts Movement, which was dedicated to liberating the mind from complacency. Throughout the 50s, the majority of Beat poets were content to create a self-reflexive verse, but not Bob Kaufman. His poems often remind society that all is not so perfect in



this sphere, and our knowledge must be informed with the truth of our place and our participation in all that has gone before this time. Here the speaker begins retelling a biblical story in a hip and current way. The first stanza of “Benediction” opens into biblical history.

Pale brown Moses went down to Egypt land  
To let somebody’s people go.  
Keep him out of Florida, no UN there:  
The poor governor is all alone,  
With six hundred thousand illiterates. (1-5)

The Biblical allusion of course recalls the classic situation of the chosen people, the Jews, struggling to escape captivity in Egypt. This saga also figured prominently during the period of slavery in America, when Blacks created the “Spirituals” or “Sorrow Songs” as W. E. B. Du Bois called them, including “Go Down, Moses.” These spirituals were encoded with double messages, at once reflecting on Biblical events, but also signaling slaves when to escape. Kaufman in this poem recalls that tradition, while relating it to the present day Jim Crow era of the 50s as well as the other oppressive instances mentioned in the poem.

Here Egypt, the oppressor, is America, and some “Pale brown Moses” is out to save the people. The updated story is loaded with warnings of trouble, “no UN” and a “poor governor” whose only counsel is “six hundred thousand illiterates,” a reference to the kind of men who would people the Ku Klux Klan, or other poor illiterate southerners who actively discriminate because of ignorance, attempting to hold on to whatever notions of racial superiority they inherited.

In a switch, the speaker professes forgiveness of the sins of America, but at the same time, indicts America for her sins.

America, I forgive you . . . I forgive you  
Nailing black Jesus to an imported cross  
Every six weeks in Dawson, Georgia. (6-8)

The poet's absolution for unspeakable crimes refers to the tragic history of lynchings in the deep south. The crimes continue, "eating black children," a line that indicts the unrelenting hunger of this beast. "Burning Japanese babies defensively," alludes to the horror of Hiroshima, the dropping of the atom bomb on the defenseless in a "defensive" act. This speaker "knows" and "comprehends" this complex situation stating ironically "I realize how necessary it was" (13). This indictment continues as the speaker in one line compliments the "ancestor" who "had beautiful thoughts in his brain" (14) alluding to the Declaration of Independence when America was created for the good of the people. In the next line, the speaker scolds the "descendants" who "are experts in real estate" which points to the injustices continuously loaded on to the heads of the Native Peoples of this land. More accusations of wrongdoing come with the lines that follow. As in the Black Aesthetic tradition, this is art for the people's education and uplift. The next line clearly paints the image of the atomic bomb, those unforgettable images that haunt even the "generals" with ideals of military might turned to devastation.

Your generals have mushrooming visions.

Every day your people get more and more  
Cars, televisions, sickness, death dreams,  
You must have been great

Alive. (16-20)

The speaker lands a last surprising blow; the military generals seem to be at fault; but next, it is the people who are equally guilty with their excesses, their consumer-itis so prevalent that they miss the big picture. The last two lines are a clear negative criticism, surely revealing the poet's earlier forgiveness as not sincere, but rather tongue-in-cheek.

This poem's spareness shows Bob Kaufman's use of language with a purpose beyond art for art's sake. Here, Kaufman attacks America's injustice without fear, stating the truth of her historically bad behavior against people over time, from Blacks in the south, to innocent Japanese, to the Native Peoples of this land. In addition, her "so called success" has turned its people into consumers at any cost. This is protest verse at its best, artful, creative, surreal, but powerfully truthful and clever, bringing so much meaning to bear in so few words. Kaufman cleverly uses the Catholic benediction as a trope to invoke an indictment of America's sins. It is also an understated message, a blessing for the audience to forgive or become aware of their complicity in these acts knowingly or unknowingly.

In another quasi-narrative, "West Coast Sounds–1956," Kaufman's persona weaves a tale about the hip Beat poets and writers from New York to San Francisco .

San Fran, hipster land.  
Jazz sounds, wig sounds,  
Earthquake sounds, others, (1-3)

This is one of the few poems that is dated, 1956, the hey day of the Beat era. The language here is hip, as suggested by calling the city by the Bay "San Fran" for short. It is

a land of hipsters. This place swings with “Jazz sounds, wig sounds, /” even “Earthquake sounds,” a place of the real (“Jazz”) and the surreal (“wig sounds”). It then loops back to the real “Earthquake sounds,” where nature is felt and heard. Then, the speaker tells of the special folks there; and here, the list proclaims the Beat principal writers. The poem continues.

Allen on Chestnut Street  
Giving poetry to squares,  
Corso on knees, pleading,  
God eyes,  
Rexroth, Feringhetti,  
Swinging, in cellars,  
Kerouac at Locke’s,  
Writing Neil  
On high typewriter, . . . . (4-12)

The speaker poses Allen Ginsberg as a prophetic figure who enlightens squares, the “unhip.”. The image of Gregory Corso on his “knees, pleading” for what we are not told but pleading with “God eyes,” suggests his spiritual qualities. Rexroth was one of the leading West Coast writers who prefigured Ginsberg. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the founder of City Lights Books, was a poet in his own right, who turned book seller and publisher, but he relished “swinging, in cellars” with his peers. The bookstore itself, City Lights, has a basement with a cellar feel; also at the time, some clubs were in cellars, dark places where Jazz could be heard and celebrated. Then Mr. Beat himself, Jack Kerouac, appears “Writing Neil” Cherkowski. This poem which begins as a tale turns into a list of Beat principal writers, all contributing to the special “West Coast Sounds” that special year of

1956. Then, “On high typewriter,/ Neil . . . / On zigzag tracks” implies on one hand that this writing is up there, high; but on the other hand, Neil is high on marijuana, since zigzag is the trade name of wrapping papers for cigarets or (marijuana) joints. Double entendre works, even the zigzag image; for the speaker then jumps or zigzags into the many cats, these poet men, “Falling in,” only they are from New York or in New York. There are too many of them, too many cats on the scene, and it is crowded. Back on the West Coast, the speaker states that the “Monterey scene [is] cooler,” and that “San Francers, [are] falling down” for some reason, which could be an overcrowding of these Beat poet cats. The speaker clarifies this. Since the “Canneries closing,” the “Sardines [are] splitting/ for Mexico,” even the speaker. The “sardines” are those many Beat poets, packed like spoons in cans. The poets/ sardines are on top of each other; and since there’s no space, they leave for Mexico. Actually, many of these Beats did go to Mexico; Kaufman did as well.

This short poem does a surreal zig across the country to name and praise Beat principal writers. It notes how the poetry scene changed, how these hip sound makers moved when necessary, to make it, to be themselves. It is an apt document of the scene at the time, a sort of Beat literary map of the day.

The final poem of this category is “Grandfather Was Queer, Too. ” It will be discussed in the section on reading Kaufman as southern. It, too, is a quasi-narrative, one that is not a linear recollection but a surreal rendering of his story.

These poems are called quasi-narratives because they tell the Beat story within a surreal fabric, which is not always logical, linear, or straightforward. The result is an

understanding layered with multiple awareness of experience, reality filtered through a surreal perception of life.

**Praise Poems.** Some of the other poems in the *Solitudes* collection are Praise Songs to Beat principals. In this way, Kaufman's poetics are in direct line with the African and African American literary traditions. Praise Songs are also called Praise Poems, and stem from the tradition of spirituals. These songs, or poems of praise, are "found virtually in all regions of Africa, they extols kings, warriors, distinguished members of society, and the gods" (Hill 44). According to Patricia Liggins Hill, "short praise poems appear throughout oral heroic epics," and she refers to the epic of *Sunjata* as an example (45). *Sunjata* is also called *Sundiata* and celebrates the original lion king. This great epic of Mali is sung by a griot, or the historical poet, one who can recall and recite the lineage of a people traditionally. These griots popularize the exploits of the hero, and the tales are passed on generation to generation; different details are elaborated by each teller, but the core tale remains the same. This tradition is still practiced throughout the continent.<sup>37</sup> Hill points to another example of longer praise poems, among Nigeria's Yoruba (45). These praise poems are called *oriki*, which honor God and are sung by priests as well as professional singers (Hill 45). It is this African tradition of praise songs or praise poems which were brought to America by African slaves. These praise songs celebrate and glorify God in such traditional spirituals as "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel." Some titles of African American spirituals praise biblical heroes like Moses, Joshua, Noah, or David. These songs of praise were prayers, praising Almighty God's power to deliver those in trouble or "bondage" to freedom. Some were used as

secret codes to indicate when it was safe to escape from a plantation, or to send messages that other escaped slaves had made it to freedom. This practice of praising God continues in contemporary Gospel songs.<sup>38</sup> It is no wonder that the practice carried over into the African American literary tradition.

There are a host of examples of Praise Songs or Praise Poems in Bob Kaufman's first collection. "Walking Parker Home," combines the legacy of Bird with a father reminiscing to his son; "Hart. . . . Crane," alludes to that poet's influence and power; "Blues Note," praises the genius of Ray Charles; "Dear John," is meant for John Steinbeck, whose work was revered widely and who Kaufman probably met at some point; "Ginsberg," lauds his friend Allen; "Mingus," portrays musician Charles; "San Francisco Beat," provides an ironic tribute to the city; "Patriotic Ode on the Fourteenth anniversary of the Persecution of Charlie Chaplin," offers a clear tribute to the "Little Tramp;" and "Camus, I Want to Know," praises Camus for his philosophical influence on the poet. These numerous tributes show that Kaufman was sympathetic to all kinds of contributors to music, literature, philosophy, even cinema, all of whom were victims of society's pressures.

In the poem "Walking Parker Home," Kaufman displays the legacy of Bird, as a father reminisces to his son, Parker, who is named after the leading jazzman. Eileen Kaufman recalls that it was Jack Kerouac's suggestion that she and Bob name their son Parker. This is an important poem not just because it praises Charlie Parker, the co-founder of Bebop, but because the poem epitomizes Jazz as a trope of a creative power which can heal.

## WALKING PARKER HOME

Sweet beats of jazz impaled on slivers of wind  
Kansas Black Morning/ First Horn Eyes/ . . . (1-2)

The poem opens recalling Charlie Parker's origins in Kansas City, and the ability of his "First Horn Eyes/" to evoke meaning through musical notes. For Kaufman, Parker is a genius who must be honored.

Following the lead of Gwendolyn Brooks, Joanne V. Gabbin asserts that "African American poetry is the aesthetic chronicle of a 'race;'" it has struggled to life, "its face all unashamed" in an alien land (585). This echoes Kaufman's perception of Parker's contribution. In "Walking Parker Home," we meet Bob Kaufman with his Black and Beat personae wrapped into one. The focus is the redeeming creative nature of Jazz as embodied in "Bird's" innovations. Jazz is a uniquely Black contribution to the world, but Parker took Jazz to new heights. The Beats recognized this and bowed to it.

An alto saxophonist, Parker experimented "with harmonic structures, but also possessed a strong political edge, which would make it the inspiration of numerous artists, black and white, who were looking for a means of confronting the sterility of Cold War Culture" (Hall 559). It was through innovators like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker that Jazz after World War II went beyond the ballroom dancing music of the big swing bands. This intimate Jazz performed in smokey joints broke the rules of traditional song. Melodies became split, and its players wove in and out of a standard song in unpredictable manners, expressing both a deep knowledge of musicology in the abstract and a surreal



rendering of music. In other words, here is the history, the basic melody; but these musicians were able to take flight from the standard, to break the barriers of harmony to suggest other moods below and above a song, the way a bird darts in play. Parker in particular was adept at this deviating from the rhythm, effecting a syncopation that was built on all the music before him, making it new. Kaufman's next lines attempt to explain in a listing of jazz images.

Lurking Hawkins/ shadows of Lester/ realization  
Bronze fingers—brain extensions seeking trapped sounds. . . (6-7)

Operating in an improvised manner himself, Kaufman hears in Bird's "bronze fingers" his forerunners, Coleman Hawkins, "Pres," Lester Young, who was called the President of Jazz in his day. The speaker here attempts to capture what informs Parker's brilliance. The poem continues.

Ghetto thoughts/ bandstand courage/ solo flight. . . (8)  
Birdland nights on bop mountains, windy saxophone  
    revolutions  
Dayrooms of junk/ and melting walls and circling vultures/  
Money cancer/ remembered pain/ terror flights/ . . . (17-19)

These lines speak the span of Parker's breath, from the Ghetto to the bandstand, a move requiring stellar creativity and courage, a "solo flight" he tells us. This trip is fraught with "suspicions," with "doubts" on the table of "New York altar city" which is riddled with "black tears" and so many "secret disciples" who are at the mercy and benefit of what follows. Those "Hammer horn pounding soul marks on unswinging gates" which tells us that Jazz is an effervescent Black ancestral spiritual thing that can only be

experienced and felt. Or, as Dizzy's anthem in "Salt Peanuts" tells us, "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing." In other words, after hearing Parker, the ability to swing is revealed; but for Parker, swinging so intensely has its price; "Panic excursions to tribal Jazz wombs and transfusions/ Heroin nights of birth/ and soaring/ over boppy new ground" (lines 14-15). Parker's heroin addition was perhaps a result of his panic from or over the price he paid to break rules, to push melody into new ground, "tribal Jazz wombs." This caused Parker "Smothered rage" which covered "pyramids of notes spontaneously/ exploding" onto the music scene of players and audience. The spontaneity of his playing was like explosions of sound which brought with it "Cool revelations/ shrill hopes/ beauty speared into/ greedy ears." This musical sound is so profound that it becomes the ultimate "cool," revealing hopes and beauty at once for an audience turned greedy, since they can't get enough of his playing, his compositions. These were brilliant nights, "Birdland nights on bop mountains," Birdland being the name of the famous Jazz club and the new land named for Parker's genius. According to Eugene Redmond, "Bebop was one way the black man used to fight the commercialization of his art" (298). The Beat and Black beauty Parker creates causes "windy saxophone/ revolutions," a playing that reinvents what the instrument can do. The cost is terrible too, for Parker descends from the bop mountain into "Dayrooms of junk/ melting walls and circling vultures/ Money cancer/ remembered pain/ terror flights/ Death and indestructible existence" (22-24). Finally, there is death, but the power of his playing, his compositions, his recordings are his "indestructible existence."

This special Jazz place is where the miracle occurs. Parker's ultimate gift is Jazz

as he could live it, played it; he left it for us to consume.

In that Jazz corner of life  
Wrapped in a mist of sound  
His legacy, our Jazz-tinted dawn  
Wailing his triumphs of oddly begotten dreams  
Inviting the nerveless to feel once more  
That fierce dying of humans consumed  
In raging fires of Love. (21-27)

Parker's Bebop Jazz causes the "nerveless" "to feel once more," the speaker tells us. Jazz is a powerful music, as great as "the raging fires of Love" to these "dying humans," and we are all dying a minute at a time. Jazz is the ultimate balm, the recreating force for good, and Kaufman rejoices that this creativity comes from his people, Black people. This is Charlie Parker's legacy, and this poem is Kaufman's Praise Song to Parker's greatness. Kaufman leaves it in turn to his son, who is named for the Jazz phenomenon, endowing his son's life with all this love and creativity, the force of Charlie Parker's Bebop.

Eugene Redmond, notes that Charlie Parker's death in 1955 signaled the decline of Bebop and the silencing of "jazz's greatest contemporary interpreter" (296). After Billie Holiday died in 1959, Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright 1960, and W.E.B. Du Bois in 1963. Many other great cultural icons and poets who passed away soon after included Malcolm X (1965); Melvin B. Tolson (1966); Jean Toomer (1967); Langston Hughes (1967); Henry Dumas (1968); Jackie Robinson (1972); and Arna Bontemps (1973). According to Eugene Redmond, such a list of dead dignitaries prompted the fact

that “Death, in one way or another, not only preoccupied writers (black and white), but was often romantically pursued” (298). “Beat poet Kenneth Rexroth asked, ‘Why have 30 american poets committed suicide since 1900?’” (qtd in Redmond 298). It is no wonder that Bob Kaufman was contemplating death and what it means in the lives of those artists discussed in these poems: Parker, Bodenheimer, Dylan Thomas, and Poe.

Kaufman was of course participating in a distinguished literary tradition. The poetic form, elegy, is “a sustained and formal poem setting forth meditations on death or another solemn theme” (Harmon 178). “The meditation often is occasioned by the death of a particular person, but it may be a generalized observation or the expression of a solemn mood” (Harmon 178). This notion of elegy is tied closely to the African American Praise Song defined earlier; this poem of praise can refer to a person living, but also to the dead. This common practice in many parts of Africa had continued as a poetic tradition since the beginning of the American literary tradition. The neoclassical poems of Phillis Wheatley combined the formal elegy with the African Praise Song. Of course, there is rarely an elegiac meter in this form’s use after the 50s. It is in this combination of the lyrical elegy and the Praise Song that Bob Kaufman contemplates Hart Crane.

Hart Crane, an American poet who was born in 1899, committed suicide in 1932. When he was “despondent over the tensions of his life, he jumped from a ship into the Caribbean and drowned” (*Merriam Encyclopedia of Lit.* 279-280). Crane’s poems celebrate the richness of life in lyrics of visionary intensity. His most important work, *The Bridge* (1930), inspired in part by the Brooklyn Bridge, represents human creative power uniting the present and the past. It is this poetic achievement Bob Kaufman

celebrates in his poem.

HART . . . . CRANE

They fear you, Crane . . . . you whispered aloft, pains they  
buried forever . . . .

They hate you, Crane . . . . your sur-real eclipses blot out their  
muted sun . . . .

They miss you, Crane . . . . your footprints are on their rotting  
teeth . . . . (1-3)

This is one of the few Kaufman poems that uses repetition for effect, and even the repeating form varies to encompass all the ways readers love and hate Crane. There is the expected juxtaposition of things real and imagined, such as the fear readers have while they “whisper. . .pains they buried forever” and contemplate “footprints on . . . rotting teeth,” references which provide a whimsical opening to a momentum that builds into even more surreal images. Crane is so studied, Kaufman fantastically claims, that readers have “memorized the pimples on” his “soul,” and his “petrified sperm is treasured by marble lovers”(15-22). Kaufman’s surreal assessment builds, stating Crane’s “eyebrows are on their glossy calendars” (29-30); “They sell you Crane . . . . spreadeagled on grills of poetic eating places”(33-34).

These worshipers of Hart Crane “enshrine” him on “suicide altars of pain” (lines 37-38), and they eventually kill him for he becomes “electrocuted at breakfast in gas-chamber kitchens” (29-40). Finally, Crane leaves, “taking his realities with” him for he is “safely dead,” yet he never died; for in the final line, Kaufman celebrates that “They live

you, Crane . . . . on the bridge” the last three words of which appear in small caps, a technique favored by Kaufman, often for titles and for emphasis in other poems.<sup>39</sup> In Whitman-like lines spread from one margin to the other, Kaufman makes a strong case for the effects of Crane’s surreal power and influence.

In the poem, “Blues Note,” Bob Kaufman creates a Praise Song for the genius of Ray Charles. Like Charlie Parker’s relation to Bebop Jazz, the music of Ray Charles came belly up from the southern delta Blues, straight out of African America. Kaufman attributes his favorite natural element, the wind, to Ray Charles, but he is a “black wind” whose heights of musicianship are as majestic as the African mountain Kilimanjaro.

#### BLUES NOTE

Ray Charles is the black wind of Kilimanjaro,  
Screaming up-and-down blues,  
Moaning happy on all the elevators of my time. (1-3)

In this way, Bob Kaufman connects the reach of Charles and his connection to Kaufman’s roots in the Mother/ Fatherland from Kilimanjaro through the “elevators” of his time. When Kaufman praises the “African symphony/ Hidden in his throat” (lines 3 and 4), he relates this quality to Charles’s hit song, “I Got a Woman.” This is a happy poem, composed for Ray Charles’s birthday in New York City in 1961. This explosion of gratitude for this composer, musician, blues man, R & B, and Country performer, features the boasting hyperbole of the toast tradition in the fifth stanza.

From his mouth he hurls chunks of raw soul.  
He separated the sea of polluted sounds  
And led the blues into the Promised Land. (11-13)

These lines of hyperbole and boasting recall the street tradition of Black male toasts such as “Shine and the Titanic” and also prefigures such poems as Nikki Giovanni’s famous poem “Ego Tripping.” It would not be a Kaufman poem without at least one surreal image, such as is found in the third stanza.

He burst from Bessie’s crushed black skull  
One cold night outside of Nashville, shouting,  
And grows bluer from memory, glowing bluer, still. (6-8)

Ray Charles’s blues are inherited from the Empress of the blues, Bessie Smith. Kaufman links the power of one blues giant to another, also he acknowledges her untimely and unfortunate demise, all in praise to both.<sup>40</sup> In the next brief fourth stanza, the image could be a surreal painting.

At certain times you can see the moon  
Balanced on his head. (9-10)

Finally, the poem closes with an important critical comment on Ray Charles’s power; he “is a dangerous man” (14). For Bob Kaufman, Ray Charles is not just a delightful performer; he composes timeless songs that are poetry. This makes him a dangerous man. Kaufman said that “the personality of the poet has to add dimensions to the poetry. . . . Real poetry is dangerous and daring. . . . It can’t come from the insecure” (8/29/76).<sup>41</sup> Kaufman appreciates that Ray Charles is a poet who captures the Black idiom as art, “way cross town” (9), echoing a popular line from the Charles song. Kaufman ends with the clearly and simply stated line:

And I love him.(15)

Written on the occasion of his birthday, this poem is so happy it can be called occasional verse, but I doubt that Hallmark has such a personal greeting for Ray Charles, whose life was recently commercially celebrated with a movie starring Jamie Foxx. Ray Charles' music is loved the world over, but he is rarely considered in such a novel and significant way. Kaufman assigns high social and musical importance to Charles's artistry.

In a more complex and personal tribute, Kaufman's Praise Song "Dear John" is more elegaic. In this poem for someone named John, Kaufman riffs on the form of the "Dear John" letter. The speaker regrets the loss of his old self. The poem begins as a traditional letter, the salutation of which uses the colon, used for business correspondence rather than a more personal comma.

DEAR JOHN:

It has been a lifetime, it seems.  
I am no longer what I once was  
So I can't speak with my old eloquence.  
I have become less and darker  
Than a shadow. . . . (1-5)

The persona reminisces not just on the good old times they had together, but is saddened by the loss of the man he was once, the way he gleamed with the future before him. In this poem, the tone is somber as the speaker regrets that lost "lifetime." Even his language is powerless to recapture that youth, that old energy, for he has "become less and darker than a shadow." Those days were so lively, the persona feels that he "never



recovered from Danny's party"(6). In stanza two, the effects of missing that past remain.

I don't know what happened or when,  
but I don't make that scene anymore. (8-9)

For this speaker, the times have changed, the way the past disappears before one realizes it. Now, this persona feels as "strange/ as an old deserted movie set" (10). By the second stanza, the "scene" has changed to new "Fluorescent lighting" and feeling strange as "an old deserted movie set" (9-12). A character named "Doc" is added in the next two stanzas. The speaker and Doc loved "crazy-beauty whores" (16). This image signals macho men of a different era, inhaling groupies of some sort. The language is degrading and sexist, but at least they "loved" these "beauties" who were loose.

It is in that fourth stanza, where the "Doc" character rings a bell. The empty movie set image takes on greater significance when considered with the loss, the name John, and the "Doc" with the groupies appearing in the next stanza; it sounds like a literary letter to John Steinbeck especially when the persona signs the letter from "Cannery Row," which is the title of Steinbeck's novel with its portraits of "outsiders" who struggle to comprehend their place in the world. *Cannery Row* is a novel set among sardine canneries, vacant lots, flophouses, and honky-tonks of Monterey, California, providing a gallery of denizens of the place including a character named Doc.<sup>42</sup> The plot moves toward giving the "Doc" figure a party. *Cannery Row* is a humorous novel with sub-themes that read like Kaufman poems: issues of isolation, loneliness, defeat. Kaufman's "Dear John:" poem celebrates the crazy parties of the novel, but its sadness articulates loss, perhaps of an innocence the speaker once felt. The struggles of life, the

disappointments, the perception of community and who that includes, the highs and lows of life appear in Steinbeck and Kaufman; their ideals are simpatico. The pals or paisano's of Steinbeck's novel, become the paisans of Kaufman's poem in the penultimate stanza. In a switch of tone, the perfunctory happenings of the present, the "two big fashionable eating joints, gift joints, a new Buick," and "all that gas" bugs the speaker. The poem ends affectionately, naming the place and the allusion.

Yours in warm remembrance,

Cannery Row.

Though personal and sad in tone over the loss of those old days, this poem is straightforward, and basically realistic. Without the reference to Steinbeck's novel, it would be unremarkable in form and image except for the powerful first five lines of the opening stanza, which is the only part that evokes the eloquence the speaker says is lost. With this added layering of meaning, readers must consider that Kaufman inserts into the "Dear John" form a double entendre, a sense of loss, not for the novel itself, but a reference of defeat, a lament when a novelist writes honestly, and simply, he receives negative reviews. Steinbeck's early critics mistook his "simple folk" for simplicity. Like Steinbeck, Kaufman is trying to see men as men, to accept difference, to make community where one finds it, to understand humanity, and to make room for love.

In his poem entitled "Ginsberg," written for his friend, Allen, Kaufman's surreal power of image returns to make tribute. For Kaufman, Ginsberg, the most famous of the Beat poets, was mostly a friend, one he admired as a person, as this Praise Poem tells us.

The poem begins as follows.

GINSBERG ( for Allen)

Ginsberg won't stop tossing lions to the martyrs.

This ends the campaign by leftwing cardinals to elect an Eskimo Pope. (1-2)

In this poem, the Allen Ginsberg we meet possesses the strength of a prophet who like someone special of Biblical proportions has the power to “toss lions to the martyrs” and not the reverse as in the real world. This power is in his creativity, his poetry, showing what can occur when a poet writes about what is true and interesting. Then in typical Kaufman surreal fashion, Ginsberg's creative power clips the conservative religious establishment, disguised as “leftwing,” dead in their tracks. The next lines continue the assault on the church. Kaufman takes a surreal survey of the conservative nature of the times.

The Church is becoming alarmed by the number of people defecting to God.  
The Holy Intelligence Agency is puzzled. . . . (3-4)

Something is out of kilter for the persona. The “Church,” the symbol of what is supposed to provide the people's spiritual leadership is so broken, that people sidestep it and go directly to God. The persona attaches reverence by using a capital “G,” in God. The “Church,” that “Holy Intelligence Agency” is in a quandary. The poet Ginsberg has upset the balance, causing a change in the people's spiritual attention. In the next line, the “Church” fights back because they “Use spiritual brainwashing in addition to promises of quick sainthood” (5). The “Church” is further attacked since it “sells” favors; this puts

any idea of goodness at stake. For Kaufman, Ginsberg is a “spiritual” man who can promise “quick sainthood” to the deserving (we hope). In the next lines, Ginsberg is again placed in a special status.

The holy stepfather cautioned the faithful to emulate none of  
the saints who hide behind the Fifth Commandment  
when persecuted. (10-13)

Ginsberg is now raised to “saint” status. He is again under attack by the “holy” establishment; in this, a “holy stepfather,” not the “Holy Father.” The persona’s fun continues when the “good guys,” “the faithful,” are warned against this “saint” Allen, since he hides not behind the Fifth Amendment, but the Fifth Commandment, which is “Thou shalt not kill.” Surely, Allen’s plea will be heard. The attack against him is a strong one, so he hides behind the right to life. This “catechism” lesson is further turned on itself in the next lines.

The poet continues to smoke carnal knowledge knowingly.  
I am sure the government can’t prove that he is  
stolen property; (14-16)

The speaker refers to Ginsberg’s openness regarding his sexual orientation; but lest the reader forget, the speaker lightens the seriousness at stake. Ginsberg is innocent of being “stolen.”<sup>43</sup> With all his power, this poet, Ginsberg is plagued by forbidden fruits, what he smokes, that “carnal knowledge” in which he partakes knowingly. This refers to the frank references to homosexuality appearing in Ginsberg’s work; at the time, this was so shocking that his publisher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, was taken to court on obscenity

charges for publishing Ginsberg's long poem *Howl*.

Continuing the fun, Kaufman jokes at the problems of being Jewish and overtly gay during the 50s. "I have proof that he was Gertrude Stein's medicine chest" (17). The speaker gives a surreal testimony, placing Ginsberg in Gertrude Stein's bag of remedies. Like Ginsberg, Stein was American, Jewish, and Gay. The reference to being her medicine chest suggests the healing power of Ginsberg's presence and poetry. It may also refer to the fact that during World War I, Stein and Alice B. Toklas drove supplies to French hospitals and were later honored for this work by the French Government. In this way, the persona and Kaufman honor Ginsberg.

Ultimately, this friendship developed because Ginsberg and Kaufman were intellectuals of like mind, with a shared spiritual and cultural legacy, Jewish and literary; they both loved to read their poems aloud as incantations. In this Praise Song, Kaufman, above all proves that Ginsberg is a human being, a sensitive soul with the power and gift of language.

He must have been hurt by real love, and false love too. (23)  
Why I love him, though, is equatorially sound:  
I love him because his eyes leak. (27-28)

In Kaufman's Praise Song for musician Charles "Mingus," a short three-line, three stanza poem immortalizes an important Jazz man. This first stanza is haiku-like in style.<sup>44</sup>

MINGUS

String-chewing bass players,

Plucking rolled balls of sound  
From the jazz-scented night. (1-3)

Charles Mingus was a bass player extraordinaire; he was also a composer, a band leader and pianist. Having studied in Los Angeles under Buddy Collette, he began playing with the early Jazz masters, from Louis Armstrong and Kid Ory to Lionel Hampton in the late 40s, which landed him on the 1947 Bebop album on Decca which featured his own composition *Mingus Fingers* (Feathers 335). Later, he played with Charlie Parker, Stan Getz, Duke Ellington, Bud Powell, and Art Tatum (Feathers 335). Bebop lovers say that it was Mingus's fingers that gave Bebop the foundation to create, while holding on to atonality and experimentation. His playing, like Parker's and Gillespie's led in a new direction (Feathers 335). In Kaufman's poem on Mingus, we meet those "hungry beat seekers" with their "Finger-shaped heartbeats" and "their greedy eyes." For them, Mingus was proper Bebop food, like "Smoke crystals, from the nostrils" fit "To light (Of) the imaginary night."

In the poem "San Francisco Beat," Kaufman pays an ironic tribute to the city;

#### SAN FRANCISCO BEAT

Hidden in the eye of jazz,  
Secretly hailing, against time.  
I see cabbage eye, malignant successes,  
Eating plastic ball-shaped benzedrines,  
Hiding in the windows of empty doghouses,  
Among limb shops, selling breast,  
To rookie policemen. (1-7)

This poem is a surrealistic and ironic Praise Song to the city of St. Francis, home to these Jazz folks. It's message is not good, and perhaps signals a warning, that the city is in need of serious self-evaluation. There is hidden danger here, causing sickness. Even the policemen are corrupt. This poem is more Jeremiad than simple lyric, for the subject is disturbing. The Beat scene is not all it was or is supposed to be. In the next stanza, the complaint is made more clear.

Jazz cops with ivory night sticks,  
Leaning on the heads of imitation Negroes  
Selling ice cubes to returned virgins,  
Wrapping velvet Band-aids, over holes  
In the arms of heaven-headed junkies. (8-12)

The poet speaker is not just haunted. Music critics have turned into monsters, so called "Jazz cops" who are beating up what is real and good with "ivory nightsticks." In addition to beating up on Jazz music, they lean "on the heads of imitation Negroes," in the way that infamous North Beach cop, Biggerini, literally beat up Bob Kaufman with his nightstick. The cop sees a "Negro," but the persona, and perhaps Kaufman, is imitation Negro; after all, he is a poet, and he is a Beatnik. This image recalls Mailer's "White Negro," those white Beatniks who appropriated Negro culture. They dressed like Negro Jazz musicians, spoke like them, and wished to be hip like them. They were all abused by the cops regularly.

They weren't alone; during these days of McCarthy paranoia, America trembled. This was the worst time to speak one's mind. Kaufman served his country in the

Merchant Marine. Wasn't he American? What is a Negro anyway? As Katheryne V. Lindberg suggests, Kaufman echoes "[Frantz] Fanon's concern with seeing and being seen differently, and his playing, as a black man, off Lacanian identity and/or the mirror stage" (164). Kaufman plays no easy race card. He is at once Negro and man. His indictment is sweeping; the speaker catalogues all the wrongs: virgins are returned, and junkies will die. This harsh complaint continues in the next stanza.

Hawkeyed baggy-pants businessmen,  
Building earthquake-proof, aluminum whorehouses,  
Guaranteeing satisfaction to pinstripe murderers,  
Or your money back to West Heaven,  
Full of Glorious, Caesarean-section politicians,  
Giving kisses to round half-lipped babies,  
Eating metal jazz, from cavities, in father's chest,  
Purchased in flagpole war, to leave balloon-chested  
Unfreaked Reader's Digest women grinning at Coit Tower. (13-21)

The images indict the status quo, the businessmen have shifty eyes like a hawk; these entrepreneurs' earthquake-proof buildings are sold in the interest of the people, but they also build whorehouses out of light-weight aluminum, perhaps so they can be quickly dismantled at the first sign of trouble. The politicians are blasted, their programs for the poor and needy the "section" which are also easily removed like a Caesar-like politician performs a Caesarean section, where the fetus is quickly and unnaturally removed. Jazz turns into metal and suffers from decay, while calm middle-class women are tourists at local monuments. So much is wrong in this scene; will the speaker offer any salvation?

The next stanza continues this castigation. The images in this "San Francisco



Beat” paint beat up lives of insincere imposters, those “graduate celibates selling polka-dot diaphragms” (23). These people, even the young and gay, turn into monsters and drown in the gutters of streets, the places where only trash and run-off is flushed out (24). True communication is replaced by superficial “telemothervisionfather,” the source of the ills, the mis-information, when television is the mother and father of current events. This causes minds to be vacuumed, the masses painted as “littlesmallbig people” (26). Further damage is amassed because the people are sucked into negative obedience (27). Then, the speaker drops the final complaint.

Into cathode obedience, demanding all onions  
For one flyspeck of love I keep hidden,  
In my webbed feet,  
Out of step. (27-30)

The city has all this Jazz culture, but it beats the speaker and all who live there down, in spite of its gifts. This aspect of the “Beat” generation is truly out of sorts, downtrodden, turned into the meek, not by choice but by the effects of America’s affluence. In this poem, Kaufman articulates the Beat ideal of stepping out of the mainstream because it is sucking the life out of people. It is no wonder the Beats considered themselves outsiders.

In another Praise Song, Charlie Chaplin is the subject painted in surreal electric colors. Called, “Patriotic Ode on the Fourteenth anniversary of the Persecution of Charlie Chaplin.” Kaufman, like Chaplin was a “Tramp,” a small-framed man who darted in and out of the Beat scene. He admires Chaplin’s talent, and identifies with his social

ostracism, and his love of the comical. This poem of only seven lines is pure fun on the surface praising the antics of Charlie Chaplin, but it has a serious undertone.

Come on out of there with your hands up, Chaplin. (1)

The opening line recalls the image of the actor in a stickup, perhaps one of the famous Keystone Cops antics of the early film era. Chaplin was a gifted actor whose principal character was “The Tramp,” a slight man, a vagrant with the dignity of a gentleman, and whose movements were comical. This time, Kaufman holds the stick up, and we meet Chaplin in his “sitting Bull Suit” with his “amazing Presto Lighter,” which is surely an invention that came later than the film days of Mr. Chaplin. Here again, Kaufman melds the past into the present in surreal time. Portraying the film star as an accused criminal, the speaker finds Chaplin’s “fingerprints on the World’s Fair” and teases Chaplin, telling him to give “back the money and start over as a cowboy” (6). During the McCarthy era, Chaplin was accused of “un-American activities” as a suspected communist. For Kaufman, Chaplin is only guilty of attending the World’s Fair. Chaplin eventually directed films; and in this poem, Kaufman directs Chaplin to change roles, to become a “cowboy,” and to laugh in response to ridiculous accusations. Finally, the speaker says, “we mean business.” Laugh Chaplin, Kaufman tells him, just keep laughing.

The final Praise Song poem is to French Algerian writer Albert Camus, and is an elegy. Novelist, essayist, and playwright, Camus’s work addressed the isolation of the individual in an alien universe. His existential philosophy prefigures the Beat generation

in his focus on the alienated individual, facing the problem of evil, and the finality of death. Camus died in 1960. In the poem entitled “Camus, I Want to Know,” Kaufman investigates, through a repetitive line beginning with the writer’s name each time, a surreal list of perplexities. These are all placed as rhetorical questions to Camus, who in his wisdom, may have the answers

### CAMUS, I WANT TO KNOW

Camus, I want to know, does the cold knife of wind plunge  
noiselessly in to the soul, finally

The speaker wishes insight, or better, enlightenment, and asks Camus if this is possible? The speaker wants to know “does the seated death wing as sudden, swifter than Fascist bullets” (3-40); is death quick? The movement of fascism swept the Jewish people into fear and torture; will death be this quick? The accouterments of the final act are called “the dull aesthetics,” and or juxtaposed in the same line with the surreal “rubbery thump of exploding wheels, the tick-pock of dust on steel” (10-11); the speaker contemplates the finality of a coffin, only the sound of dust falling on it is left. The persona wonders if “the sorrowful cry of unwilling companions console the dying air” (15-16), wonders if insincere grief will calm such air as death. Regret is echoed in the powerful image of “the bitter taste of unfulfilled promise” (20-21) much like the opening poem of this collection. This speaker is tortured with unresolved understanding, and wants an answer to the mystery of a life taken too soon. If one dies too soon, the “secret hoard of unanswered queries scream for ultimate solutions” (27-28); when will the persona understand? With each two-line appeal, Camus is honored for his wisdom, and

is empowered by the questions asked. The speaker expresses this “internal crucifixion” (33), the unanswered questions, the grief, pulsing with each line. At line 38, the poem changes from a series of questions into a series of statements.

Camus, I shall follow you over itching floors of black deserts,  
across roofs of burning palms. . . .

Camus, I shall reach the hot sky, my brown mouth filled with  
fragile telephones, sans rings

Camus, I shall mumble long-cherished gibberish through layers of protesting heat,  
demanding. . . (40-45)

This is a praise song of a student to his teacher, from novice to sage. The speaker will follow in the footsteps of Camus’s knowledge, even if he has to “crawl on sandpaper knees on oasis bottoms;” this neophyte’s knees are rough, skinned like those of a careless child is injured for carelessness. The speaker, a novice, promises to reach “the hot sky,” this knowledge forms above him, “his brown mouth filled with fragile telephones” without the ring. There is a need to communicate, to commune with Camus’s wisdom; like the phone unable to ring, the speaker still wishes to reach out. There is bitterness here but ultimately, the poet wishes to know if “death exists.” Kaufman, like the rest of us, must be content with Camus’ work in print and live to find out the answer for himself. Mr. Kaufman crossed that bridge in 1986.

The effect of the repetition of Camus’s name and the wish, “I want to know” becomes a mantra, a word or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation, as in a Vedic hymn. Like an Indian mantra, the repetition in Kaufman’s poem resonates with his questions in a memorable lament.

Kaufman's use of the Praise Song or Praise Poem places him firmly in the African American literary tradition and culture. The Song of Praise, especially for the elders, is an ancient practice that continues to today. His use of this tradition speaks to Kaufman's generosity of spirit. In this case, his subjects are all outsiders of sorts; his honorees comprise a motley crew: Black musicians of extraordinary measure; their personal tragedies range from heroin addiction to run-ins with the law; a well-loved actor and performer, who was also sad bum of a character; and who also suffered; a controversial philosopher; a prize winning, sometimes raw novelist, whose depression-era characters may resemble Kaufman. These poems of praise raise the stature of these outsiders to saintly status. They are given the central attention Kaufman felt they deserved. Perhaps they are all a part of Kaufman and his personality. These outsiders are people he respects; and in many ways, he identifies closely with them, their tragedies, their genius, and their efforts to survive in a world that often rejects them.

**Jazz Poems.** Thematically, only nine of the shorter poems directly address Jazz music. They are: "Walking Parker Home," written for Bob's son, and which was discussed in the previous section. Another such poem is the celebrated "Battle Report." Kaufman's lyric clearly prefigures the hilarious poem by Ntozake Shange called "I Live in Music" in which she has "15 trumpets where other folks got hips." In the work of both artists, the buoyancy is multiplied by the magic of sound.

## BATTLE REPORT

One thousand saxophones infiltrate the city,  
Each with a man inside,  
Hidden in ordinary cases,  
Labeled FRAGILE . (1-4)

As the title indicates, this poem reports a battle. Wars are fought by the brave, and build up over time brewing like a storm. The stage or battle ground here is the music of the stage. The instruments are weapon directed by Jazz men who are inside the sound. This is a wonderfully fun poem celebrating the power of Jazz music to topple anything bad, anything wrong, to heal, to sooth, to make light. Its power is that of military armed for attack, which brings to mind the secret men hidden inside the Trojan Horse of Homer's *Iliad*. While this poem is in no way an epic, the element of conflict has been essential to Jazz from its beginnings. Instruments are nothing without the music men that play them. Their power is hidden from view, and they are fragile, but as the speaker reminds us, instruments with their players have "hooks" to grab a person's sensibilities.

A fleet of trumpets drops their hooks, (6)  
Ten waves of trombones approach the city  
Under blue cover  
Of late autumn's neo-classical clouds. (7-9)

This massive onslaught of music moves in a "fleet" and rides "Ten waves," toward the city. This musical attack is under the cover of the blues, which is sifted internally and part of the foundation of Jazz. As in an active battle, a battalion of "Five hundred bassmen," is employed, "all string-feet tall,/ Beating it back to the bass" (10-11). This is a

forceful fight, described in the Black vernacular of these Jazz crusaders. “Beating it back to the bass” is musician hep talk for playing it hot, for emphasizing the rhythm. Next, a smaller unit, now less strong, advances in line 12, “One hundred drummers, each a stick in each hand,/ The delicate rumble of pianos, moving in.” These drummers mean business; they carry drumsticks like cops carry night sticks. Also, the drummers have a “stick in each hand” to play you happy. Added to this pounding possibility is the “delicate” percussive power of pianos, giving the battle more strength but also lyrical quality. The speaker continues this metaphor in the next two lines.

The secret agent, an innocent bystander,  
Drops a note in the wail box. (14-15)

Under cover, “an innocent bystander,” the person witnessing this but not taking part, “drops a note in the wail box” the way the audience makes a request to the bandstand. Then the big guns arrive. “Five generals, gathered in the gallery,/ Blowing plans” (16-17) like the Jazz geniuses on stage conferring on the play book before the set; this top brass “blow” plans like a campaign. The speaker’s “secret code” is actually the title of a Charlie Parker anthem “Now is the time,” which hailed the immediacy of music and its ability to capture the spirit now, not later, to live now, not later, the spontaneity of Jazz.

At last, the secret code is flashed:  
Now is the time, now is the time.

Attack: The sound of jazz.  
The city falls. (18-21)

As this battle ends, “the city falls” under the spell of Jazz, each Jazz sound an attack on the mind, the spirit. In this poem, Jazz powers like Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, John Coltrane attack with their unique sounds. People and cities resist, but Jazz, like the Trojan Horse, wins the Battle! This is the Beat generation basic, a reverence for the power of Jazz music, its creators, its healing balm. Jazz answered the Beat’s and Kaufman’s need for immediate and pure experience of living in the now.

“Bagel Shop Jazz,” named after the café in San Francisco, is one of Kaufman’s best known poems. In 1961, it was nominated for the prestigious Guinness Poetry Award of England. T. S. Eliot won, but Kaufman’s name was stamped upon a world wide stage. This poem was also published in the form of a broadside<sup>45</sup> from Coffee House Press at the time of the publication of Kaufman’s Collection *Cranial Guitar*. In “Bagel Shop Jazz,” the San Francisco coffee house scene is painted, and the poets and poetry lovers, the “shadow people” who peopled it appear.

#### BAGEL SHOP JAZZ

Shadow people, projected on coffee-shop walls.  
Memory formed echoes of a generation past  
Beating into now.

Nightfall creatures, eating each other  
Over a noisy cup of coffee. (1-5)

Readers can see these people, moving next to walls for privacy, then at night huddling for conversation, like “creatures” devouring conversation over a bean brew.



Mulberry-eyed girls in black stockings,  
Smelling vaguely of mint jelly and last night's bongo  
drummer, (6-8)

These are Beat women, whose black-colored stockings hint of their hip ways, or that they think they are hip. They are sweet smelling, like a jelly spread, seemingly innocent; until, we learn they also smell of "last night's drummer." These women are worldly and are taking in this scene. They are out for the night, on the prowl for experience.

Making profound remarks on the shapes of navels,  
Wondering how the short Sunset week  
Became the long Grant Avenue night,  
Love tinted, beat angels,  
Doomed to see their coffee dreams  
Crushed on the floors of time,  
As they fling their arrow legs  
To the heavens,  
Losing their doubts in the beat. (9-17)

Their "profound remarks" are intellectual masturbation, as the North Beach street café hopping runs from sunset into a long night. These are dreamers who are somehow doomed. They "fling" their pointed legs, which may imply a loose sexuality aiming for the pleasure such reaches provide. There are "doubts" in their activities and in those cups of coffee, in the beat of those times. Many more come to these places, this place.

Turtle-neck angel guys, black-haired dungaree guys,  
Caesar-jawed, with synagogue eyes,  
World travelers on the forty-one bus,

Mixing Jazz with paint talk,  
High rent, Bartok, classical murders,  
The pot shortage and last night's bust. (18-23)

The men wear the accouterments of middle-class comfort. They are handsome, and Jewish city dwellers, "world travelers" on local transit. They take in this Jazz music and discuss the news of the day and their concerns, from "high rent" to "the pot shortage."

Some of them are "Lost in a dream world/ Where time is told with a beat. . ."

This is a quintessential Beat poem, depicting the North Beach poetry scene and the haunts that allowed all kinds of people to mingle and creativity to flourish.

Coffee-faced Ivy Leaguers, in Cambridge jackets,  
Whose personal Harvard was a Fillmore district step,  
Weighted down with conga drums,  
The ancestral cross, the Othello-laid curse,  
The Talking of Bird and Diz and Miles,  
The secret terrible hurts,  
Wrapped in cool hipster smiles,  
Telling themselves, under the talk,  
This shot must be the end. (26-34)

These café goers are well-dressed and educated, but their true education comes by way of sidewalk philosophers, and not just anywhere, but in the Fillmore. This San Francisco district was the cultural heart of black intellectuals, artists, jazz musicians, and grew out of the storefronts which supported the neighborhood. These hip guys hear the conga beat which weighs on them, changing them; it is an ancient cross to bear.

In this popular, poem, the people are "Hoping the beat is really the truth," until of

course “The guilty police arrive. . . .” It is no wonder this poem is often published. Its surreal elements are juxtaposed with ordinary events; eventually, jazz emerges as the answer to all that ails us.

The poem “Jazz *Te Deum* for Inhaling At Mexican Bonfires” is an important Kaufman poem for its surreal adventures, its praise of the transforming power of Jazz, and its insights into the cultural, historical, and spiritual interests of the author. On the surface, this poem is pure pleasure, poking fun at the most unlikely combinations. The title juxtaposes the Latin words “*Te Deum*” with inhaling, as in getting high from inhaling marijuana at a Mexican bonfire. This is classic Kaufman, fusing Jazz into a sacred power.

“*Te Deum*” is a common abbreviation for the original Latin text and the translations of a hymn in rhythmical prose, of which the opening words were *Te Deum Laudamus*. Its earliest version came from the Rule of St. Caesarius for monks, written probably when he was Abbot of Lérins, before A.D. 502”(newadvent.org, screen 1). The origins of this tradition in the Roman Catholic Church is ancient, and are still debated by archeologists as well as church scholars.<sup>46</sup> All agree, however, that the important idea here is that the “*Te Deum*” is used in the Divine Office or Mass, and is sometimes sung in thanksgiving to God for some special blessing (such as the election of a pope, the consecration of a bishop, the canonization of a saint, the profession of a religious vocation, the publication of a treaty of peace, or a royal coronation), or sometimes as a separate religious ceremony” (newadvent.org, screens 5-6). In this way, Kaufman joins Jazz to the sacred very specifically, assigning all the pomp and blessings of holy ritual. The poem takes off with surreal fervor.

Let us write reeling sagas about heroic movie stars who failed  
and lived.

Let us poetize on twelve-tone prints of Schoenberg and naked  
office girls.

Let us compose Teutonic folksongs on the death of Israel's  
German tribe.

Let us chant those thousand choruses of Nefertiti's funeral  
and desert grief festivals.

Let us pluck lion-gut strings of marble lutes on teak decks  
of Ming junks. (1-19)

In the first ten lines, the reader traverses geography and cultures through incantation, from fake Hollywood heroes to an Austro-Hungarian Jewish composer, conductor, and teacher, who turned painter during compositional crises.<sup>47</sup> The reader contemplates ancient German folk songs to mourn the death of German Jews in the Holocaust. Ancient Egyptian queen Nefertiti's burial is evoked, along with the "thousands of choruses" sung in her honor, and all the burial rites of that historical Mother/Fatherland center. More exoticism comes from playing stringed instruments, on the decks of the fabled Ming dynasty pleasure boats. Kaufman is at his surreal best here; embarking on a world-wide journey, he invites the reader to join his tour, and not just as a bystander; in this poem, he urges the reader to write, chant, pluck, walk, and read with him. In this poem, the reader and the persona will wear fancy "flaming hats to Mongol dances on mummified khans' sacred Gobi" (17-18). The surreal continues in images of "suttee memories Bengal widows on Holy Ganges' burning ghats" (21-22); in the persona's India however, the poem darkens through death. A suttee is "the act of a Hindu widow who willingly suffers cremation on the funeral pyre of her husband as an

indication of her devotion to him” (*Miriam Webster* 1188). The persona has the widows on the sacred river burning ghats, those broad steps on the riverbank providing access; perhaps these women are being burned alive, since those steps are brick or some variant of concrete which can not burn. These are the memories the reader is asked to wear like clothes. There is also the surreal wonder of getting high and Jazz, perhaps getting high on Jazz, although the reader is asked to experience more than Jazz music here.

Let us inhale dreamy eternities from alabaster pipes and sail  
glowing solar boats.

Let us walk naked in radiant glacial rains and cool morphic  
thunderstorms.

Let us shrink into pigmy bo trees and cast holy shadows  
on melted cities.

Let us read forbidden Sanskrit on lotus mounds  
of Buddhist nuns. (23-30)

The drug induced dreams drawn from those lovely “alabaster pipes,” turn into “cool morphic thunderstorms,” storms only drug users can experience. The mystery and power of the far east is brought forward, as the little Pigmy bo trees, which have a connection to Buddha, are powerful and protect cities in meltdown. The persona empowers us to read the ancient language of the earth, Sanskrit, on the mounds of the sacred symbol flower, the lotus with Buddhist nuns. Are there Buddhist nuns? And what type of habits would they wear?

In the final lines, there are more irreverences to follow.

Let us wail circumsion Jossanas of lost Samaritans buried  
in rumors of love.

Let us carry Inca staves to hawk-priest rituals on altars  
of bleeding nuns.  
Let us blow African jazz in Alabama jungles and wail  
savage lovesongs of unchained fire.  
Let us melt jelly-like into damp caves of lip-biting women  
and feel dew-charred dampnesses of gyrating  
universes of smoke-flavored jazz. (35-43)

The combination of the power of Jazz and inhaling becomes the ultimate means of experience. Kaufman's language turns on itself; he is always purposeful, and it is for us to get it. Why "wail circumsion" Jossanas? Wail circles, wail in circles, Hossanas, or Joannas? In the bible, a Samaritan is anyone who is not a Jew, one of the chosen people. Perhaps he is rewriting the sacred text for fun. Are the Inca staves the system of five horizontal lines on which the musical notes are written?<sup>48</sup> The final lines "blow African jazz in Alabama jungles," which bridges the Mother/Fatherland's power with what Blacks created in America, speaks to the wild nature of the south, and Alabama, where survival for Blacks is rough as in a jungle, but wailing "savage love songs" will help. Finally, the effect is a melt down, as though we are nervous women in the audience, wet with eros, under the spell of "universes of smoke-flavored jazz."

The poem is an incantation, a list of desires perhaps for those who imbibe in marijuana sunsets. This Whitman-like line poem is surreal in its quixotic imagery and non-linear geographies and histories. From the opening, however, this Jazz poem sets a tone of seriousness in spite of the surreal images that follow. This Jazz experience, when listeners and readers are high on the music as though high on hallucinogens, summons up the possibility of a sacred mission to make things better. Finally, this poem epitomizes

the Beat ideal in its reverence for Jazz, its attraction to all things spiritual, including Catholicism, Judaism, and Buddhism. It is also continually cognizant of the Black roots and power of Jazz.

Kaufman's most powerful tribute to Jazz music in a short poem is "War Memoir." It is a true Jazz and Beat poem, filled with the anxiety of the times. This is a remembrance of a series of significant battles, not just one, but an entire war. The secret weapon appears with full guns blasting in the opening.

#### WAR MEMOIR

Jazz—listen to it at your own risk,  
At the beginning, a warm dark place.

(Her screams were trumpet laughter,  
Not quite blues, but almost sinful). (1-4)

The persona issues a warning: take care, Jazz is playing; you will be taking a chance to listen to it. At first, such lines may seem cozy, like a comfortable dark den. The attack unleashes the music, and the response is screams like "trumpet laughter," suggestive of an almost forbidden fruit. The uncontrollable response to Jazz continues.

Crying above the pain, we forgave ourselves;  
Original sin seemed a broken record.  
God played blues to kill time, all the time. (5-7)

The strength of this Jazz music is that it touches our human core, as the sounds penetrate our inhibitions; our reaction is to cry above our own pain. The surreal persona returns to connect "original sin" as a "broken record." That is sacrilege. The ultimate

joke and comment on the holy state of this music is the inference that the blues are God's habit. The poem's tone darkens in the next two lines.

(So much laughter, concealed by blood and faith;  
Life is a saxophone played by death.) (9-10)

The lines are in parentheses, as though they represent an aside to the reader, and what an aside it is. What most of us see of each other is not what lives below the laughter. Then another metaphor cinches the attack. If the Jazz spitting from saxophones can turn our insides out, it must be life "played by death." In the next stanza, Kaufman delivers an extremely rare obvious rhyme, but it is not sweet.

Greedy to please, we learned to cry;  
Hungry to live, we learned to die.  
The heart is a sad musician.  
Forever playing the blues. (11-14)

These are the Beats, beat up by life, by desire, by all that is unfulfilled. The image of a heart as a "sad musician" beating out the blues, epitomizes human melancholy, our sadness becomes forever memorable, a touching metaphor. In the next stanza, the end rhyme and internal rhythm becomes a blues song.

The blues blow life, as life blows fright;  
Death begins, jazz bows soft in the night,  
Too soft for ears of men whose minds  
Hear only the sound of death, of war,  
Of flagwrapped cremation in bitter lands. (15-19)

Life is a blues song; it is tough, and we die daily in one way or another while jazz



“blows soft in the night” as a balm for the madness of life, the wars at home and abroad, within us, and without us. The tone switches in the next stanza.

No chords of jazz as mud is shoveled  
Into the mouths of men; even the blues shy  
At cries of children dying on deserted corners,  
Jazz deserted, leaving us to our burning. (20-24)

The tragedies of life are too much for the music, and even the music is no longer available as it was. What happened? The nature of the blues is its way of finding joy out of sorrow. But in the contemporary world, kids die, deserted on street corners. It seems Jazz is stymied by such stark tragedy.

(Jazz is an African traitor.)  
What one-hundred-percent redblooded savage  
Wastes precious time listening to jazz  
With so much important killing to do?  
  
Silence the drums, that we may hear the burning  
Of Japanese in atomic colorcinemascope,  
And remember the stereophonic screaming. (24-30)

Now, Jazz is a turn coat. It absorbs pain, calms anxiety, so why dig it when the world demands dying? Jazz is “an African traitor” because it blossomed from that savage drumming into a rhythmic dance embodying several continents melting into something new. The persona wants the drums silenced long enough to hear the pain we cause, in atomic killing fields seen through high definition cinemascope. The speaker urges us to

remember the screaming, the pain we cause and feel, in stereo, let it resonate, for it is real.

This poem portrays a life in Jazz of the Beat era, and then cries out that the joy of Jazz has been silenced by the screams the U.S. causes around the world. This is the guilt weighing on Beatnik backs and Beat minds, and only Jazz gives release. But even Jazz can not stop the screams. The persona is disappointed, and feels he is losing the war for his soul since he, too, is part cause of the pain, perhaps by passive compliance. It is this guilt that beat up the Beat generation.

**Southern Poems: A Sense of Place.** Nowhere in recent or past critical literature is Bob Kaufman considered a southern poet, but one reading him cannot mistake the south, his south, revealed in his work. There is more to being a “southern writer” than being from the south. Kaufman has his birthright, but the south makes its imprint on one; its way of being and doing, its history haunts its sons and daughters personally; its sensibilities vary, but that it has its effects is a given. Critic Wyatt Prunty discusses this uniquely southern brand which lasts, no matter where one is transplanted because of opportunity; the southern sense of place carries its own understanding (745).

In the southern imagination, place is not just a name on a map but where something *took place*. . . because of what happened there. For southern poets, places take on figurative meaning. Often a place cited in a poem operates as an implied metaphor. Something happened, and where it happened evokes both the event and its consequence, even when the event is not public, . . . but private. (745)

In Kaufman’s verse, images of the south appear in a variety of ways. In the manner of Whitman’s margin-to-margin lines, in “I, too, Know What I am not,” the persona,

speaking directly to the audience, makes one declaration after another of what he is not.

The poem reads:

No, I am not death wishes of sacred rapists, singing on candy gallows.

No, I am no spoor of Creole murderers hiding in crepe-paper bayous.

No, I am not yells of some assassinated inventor, locked in his burning machine.

No, I am not forced breathing of Cairo's senile burglar, in lead shoes. (1-7)

It is as though Kaufman is divorcing himself from every cliché attached to Black men in the south. The line "Not death wishes of sacred rapists," speaks of that irrational sexual and often denied relationship of slaver to slave, one of the reasons it was called that "peculiar institution." The surreal Kaufman awakens to indict the hypocrisy of southern traditions. The line where he is "no spoor of Creole murderers hiding in crepe-paper bayous," continues the unveiling of what really happened in Kaufman's south. The word Creole carries significant historical baggage. In language and linguistics, Creole is the new language taught in the new world by parents who make the new tongue and teach it to the first born. According to Dr. de Caro, "among other things, a Creole language is not just a language that pops up in a new environment; it is some sort of fusion in a new place of older languages, such as the vocabulary from one superimposed on the grammar of another." This is why there are various Creole languages around the world in Hawaii, Canada, Australia, and other parts of the world. Historically, the term Creole refers to the mixed peoples of the New World, French/African/English or Italian/English or Spanish/French. For Kaufman, white Creoles have murdered Native Americans and lynched Blacks, their hiding in bayous of crepe-paper is no hiding at all. Reaching further

historically, the persona is “not forced breathing of Cairo’s senile burglar,” uncovering slavers as “senile burglars,” and this persona is not the result of these senile burglars, especially Europe<sup>49</sup> in leaded shoes. The weight of those heavy shoes is those European conquerors marching, Gestapo like; the soldier burglars are weighted by their evil designs, and they are destined to be weighed down and judged for their criminal plundering by history. This chant-like list of negative statements continues.

No, I am not Indian-summer fruit of Negro piano tuners,  
with muslin gloves.

No, I am not noise of two-gun senators, in hallowed  
peppermint hall.

No, I am not pipe-smoke hopes of cynical chiropractors,  
traffickers in illegal bone. (8-14)

The persona denies being some sweet stash of proper Negroes. Their white gloves indicate that they enjoy some superficially perceived status, as an inspector looking for dust; but in this case, they are only piano tuners after all. This speaks to that cadre of poor Negroes who think themselves better than others. They might be an Indian, but only for a season, which refers to the sexual intermixing of the Black and Indian, which often didn’t mean marriage. Then the speaker announces that he is not the problem of law men, or senators. Supposedly above the law, they shoot off their mouths and spew their prejudices in “peppermint” halls of justice. He is not the thin hope of quack chiropractors and surrealistically calls “traffickers in illegal bone,” playing on the too-often-heard phrase “traffickers of illegal drugs.” He continues his complaint.

No, I am not pitchblade curse of Indian suicides,

in bonnets of flaming water.  
No, I am not soap-powder sighs of impotent window washers,  
in pants of air.  
No, I am not kisses of tubercular sun addicts, smiling  
through rayon lips. (15-20)

The speaker denies complacency in Indian suicides. The “pitchblade” is a take on switchblade, a knife kept within the handle; the blade can be released by a soft touch of a button. These weapons are carried by thugs, gangsters, hoodlums. The speaker does not make the weapons of Indian suicide, and God knows there are too many in each Native culture on these shores, as their lives are often too difficult to bear. The speaker is not the artificially clean sighs of de-sexed “window washers,” those weak workers with nothing to offer. They are so devoid of passion, there’s only air in their pants, no manhood. The speaker also refuses to align himself with the fake affection of sun bathers, who think they are so cool, smiling, but they are sun sick, can’t handle it, and their lips are flimsy as rayon. The persona’s Jeremiad bites more.

No, I am not chipped philosopher’s tattered ideas sunk  
in his granite brain.  
No, I am not cry of amethyst heron, winged stone in flight  
from cambric bullets.  
No, I am not report of silenced guns, helpless  
in the pacifist hands. (21-30)

This speaker’s anger is pointed to all who are fake, broken, and spineless. He is not some “granite brain” philosopher, for surely no good ideas come from such a “hard” head. Can you hear Kaufman laughing? He is not a slave, crying because of addiction to crystal morphine, which turns wings to stone, brought down by cotton bullets. These

surreal images have fun at the expense of whatever is wrong with people. Moreover, he is not the inaction of the ones who could make a difference and do not. His final indictment returns to his roots, the Caribbean, the Mother/Fatherland Africa, and back to the Mississippi Delta.

No, I am not the whistle of Havana whores with cribs  
of Cuban death.

No, I am not the shriek of Bantu children, bent  
under pennywhistle whips.

No, I am not whisper of the African trees,  
leafy Congo telephones.

No, I am not Leadbelly of blues, escaped from guitar jails.

No, I am not anything that is anything I am not. (35-42)

The reader witnesses the speaker's historical anger. He is not the predator lusting after Havana women, turning them into whores, the children of which do not survive that fast life. He is not the screams of Bantu slave kids, lacerated by cruel "pennywhistle" whips. Pennywhistles are also those little flutes, which were used to entice children into captivity. He is not the wind through trees of the Mother/Fatherland that tell news old and new, those leafy Congo telephones. The reader can see these images as concretely as a surreal painting.

The speaker then reminds readers that he is "not anything that is anything I am not" (29).

This poem's final proclamation frees the spirit and acknowledges how his complex origins can never be easily categorized. The remainder of the poem's denouncements move in and out of the personal, commercial, political, historical,

cultural. No one escapes Kaufman's pen. His perceptions of today are implanted within the past. These are the American surreal visions of modernist man setting the record straight personally and politically, objectively and subjectively, politically, culturally, and historically. The persona rejects any easy labeling and anticipates such accusations by attacking with them first.

Certainly the Dadaists and Surrealists appearing around 1917 or so felt, as Walter Benjamin states, that "image and language is everything" in poetry. Kaufman's avant-guard brand of surrealism goes further to interpret the historical moment, appropriately and irreverently, condemning materialistic and imperialistic dominance, while challenging readers' attitudes. Like Ginsberg and Baraka, he is not afraid to confront predominant ideas or to suggest creative readings of history and its importance in the present. To this Kaufman adds wit and in many cases the humor of downright laughter; he can be serious as a heart attack and laugh about it.

In the *Solitudes* collection, one other poem faces his southern roots; it is titled "Grandfather was Queer, too." This narrative pokes fun at Kaufman's Louisiana origins while revealing in a hip, light-hearted way, the persona's (and perhaps the poet's) life-long struggle to make it in life. The poem opens state in a swamp in the poet's home.

He was first seen in a Louisiana bayou,  
Playing chess with an intellectual lobster.  
They burned his linoleum house alive  
And sent that intellectual off to jail.  
He wrote home every day, to no avail  
Grandfather had cut out, he couldn't raise the bail. (1-6)

The poem's first stanza establishes the appearance of the narrative's subject in "a Louisiana bayou" firmly planted in the lush, fertile land in a surreal chess game with an "intellectual lobster." Kaufman's concern is this odd, read queer chap,<sup>50</sup> an intellectual sent to jail after his "linoleum house" is burned alive. Kaufman's tendency here is to mix his life into that of this Grandfather figure, the old man, having lived long already, and not well off materially. This figure is so like Kaufman. At least two of his residences burned to the ground; there are many stories of his jail time. His widow, Eileen Kaufman, says that in 1959 Bob was jailed more than 35 times. Some say it was for drunkenness or drugs. Kaufman did drink a lot socially; he did drugs socially, like many of his generation; but because Kaufman was Black and irreverently outspoken,<sup>51</sup> he was jailed so regularly (and so much more than the other, white beats) that Allen Ginsberg reports there was always a can going around to get him out of jail.

Kaufman's younger brother Donald spent time in Texas with Bob. He says Bob was always discussing politics and arguing with whomever would listen, and many would. He lived from hand to mouth in Arizona, then California in the Bay Area. He was a Beat poet, but he was also just "beat," wasted, exhausted from the strains society put on him. Here, transplanted into his grandfather, the narrator reports of arranged marriage, "crossing a rich redwood and a black pine." Bob Kaufman married Eileen, who was white, as was his third significant other, Lynne Wildey. His white Grandfather also intermarried; Jewish, himself, he married a Black woman. The similarities between Bob and his grandfather are uncanny. Here there are no broad, sweeping political indictments, but a more subtle, albeit surreal twist between actual and imagined personal and political



history. The persona appears in four states, a mini-travelogue of American. He is jailed in each location for no sane reason; and in each case, the narrator reports that “Grandfather had cut out, he couldn’t raise the bail.”

Grandfather had cut out, he couldn’t raise the bail.  
Now I have seen him here. He is beat.  
His girlfriend has green ears;  
She is twenty-three months pregnant.  
I kissed them both:  
Live happily ever after. (23-28)

The narrator’s attitude is flip and mediates between factual realities, the difficult life of the “odd or queer” intellectual or artist, and the resultant reception by family and society. In this way, Kaufman discloses the narrator’s relationship with the Grandfather/ old man, creative/intellectual being, and reflects a complex although hip and sometimes comical attitude toward standard social folly. This poem becomes, then, an interior and exterior landscape. There is no sinister bitterness, no uncanny signification of anger, only awareness, warmth, the admonition to “live happily ever after” made so tongue in cheek, as if predicting no change on society’s part but no decay either. There may be wear on the Grandfather/ intellectual being’s spirit, but he remains hopeful. A new faith is on the horizon.

**Jail Poems.** Several poems point to Kaufman’s cultural and spiritual concerns, most notably the 35 stanzas in the “Jail Poems.” While in San Francisco, during 1959, Bob Kaufman was incarcerated often.<sup>52</sup> His jail experiences heightened his loneliness, his feelings of isolation and outrage, feelings shared by his Beat colleagues. The “Jail

Poems” first stanza begins as a personal testimony.

#### JAIL POEMS

I am sitting in a cell with a view of evil parallels,  
Waiting thunder to splinter me into a thousand me's.  
It is not enough to be in one cage with one self;  
I want to sit opposite every prisoner in every hole.  
Doors roll and band, every slam a finality, bang!  
The junkie disappeared into a red noise, stoning out his hell.  
The odored wino congratulates himself on not smoking,  
Fingerprints left lying on black inky gravestones,  
Noises of pain seeping through steel walls crashing  
Reach my own hurt. I become part of someone forever.  
Wild accents of criminals are sweeter tome than hum of cops,  
Busy battening down hatches of human souls; cargo  
Destined for ports of accusations, harbors of guilt.  
What do policeman eat, Socrates, still prisoner, old one? (1-14)

Readers meet the lonely persona, speaking in a calm tone of the harsh reality he faces in jail. He is the ultimate loner now, alone with “a view of evil parallels.” In these poems, Bob Kaufman articulates the anxiety of being incarcerated. He seems jittery, jumping from one idea to another, perhaps pacing. His unhappiness builds. The first evil parallel is guilt. The plausibility of a natural event “thunder” to “splinter” him into a “thousand” of himself, speaks to the need to be more than he has been, much more. He is suffering because somehow it is this one of him in trouble here, in jail. This forced isolation must be a hell of sorts; he is in “one cage with one self.” This is true loneliness,

as he is intensely aware of his isolation from everyone and everything familiar. Everything is missing from this “cage.” He is bottled like a captive animal. The result is that he desperately wants contact with people, “to sit opposite every prisoner in every hole.” This loneliness is punishment for a crime, earned or not, but the effect is the same. His sense of estrangement is criminal since it is imposed by his circumstance. Add to this the deafening sounds echoing the forced isolation, the doors rolling with a bang, and “every slam” is final. The onomatopoeia bang ending the line comes with the surprise of the exclamation point, a counter part to the bang, but in his instance, the bang will be daily. More sounds reverberate with the horror, the evil of this place. A junkie disappears into a “red noise,” the sound waves of which must be a hell to hear. Next comes the smell of a wino who is happy he no longer smokes. Could this be Kaufman, considering his life-long smoking habit that eventually kills him? Is he coming to terms with this jailed image of himself as stinky and drunk on cheap liquor? In the line in which fingerprints are left “lying” on black inky gravestones, one wonders if the persona is suggesting that someone else is responsible for the dead and buried, just as he or other prisoners are unjustly jailed, and others go free. The horrible sounds continue in “noises of pain seeping through steel walls crashing” like thunder, the moans of the disappointed, the disenchanted, the dispossessed. This resounding pain reaches the hurt of the speaker. Hurt to hurt, the speaker and the pain of those jailed are one; he becomes “part of someone forever.” Then bitterness sets when “wild accents of criminals are sweeter” to the speaker “than [the] hum of cops.” What a choice to make, when rather than have the so-called protection of police, some of whom are corrupt and mean, the speaker prefers

the company of criminals. The cops are busy at their work of “battening down hatches of human souls;” “cargo/ destined for ports of accusations, harbors of guilt.” Wright or wrong, these are men, caged cargo, headed only for accusations and guilt. These incarcerated souls must bare the brunt of their actions, their choices which landed them in this place designed to stomp on humanity. Kaufman causes us to cringe at horrible unimaginable sounds, and wholly unpleasant odors, and to feel guilty with him in his fear. The final line of this stanza explains his purpose. “What do policeman eat, Socrates. . . ?” Kaufman learned from the master minds of literature and philosophy; here, he takes on the mantle of Socratic student and presents a dialogue with the self. Like Socrates, he will examine his guilt or innocence and interrogate himself. He is disappointed in himself and is after genuine self-knowledge, no matter what he learns. He must question what is happening, why, in an effort to understand. This is a forced exile, and there is much to figure about his life, about jails, about the world. In stanza two, further anxiety builds.

Painter, paint me a crazy jail, mad, water-color cells.  
Poet, how old is suffering? Write it in yellow lead.  
God, make me a sky on my glass ceiling. I need stars now,  
To lead through this atmosphere of shrieks and private hells,  
Entrances and exits, in . . . out . . . up . . . down, the civic  
seesaw.

Here--me--now--hear--me--now--always here somehow. (15-21)

The speaker’s desires rise; for what? Color, something he took for granted; now he needs “mad water-color cells” instead of the absence of color. This line indicates the dismal surroundings. He asks himself, how old is suffering? His feeling of isolation increases, and his fear of suffering increases with it. Then he prays: God, make me a sky

on my glass ceiling,” and he needs “more stars.” He longs for the ordinary glory of God’s creation, sky, stars, the wonders of natural life now denied to him. Using one of his surrealist images, Kaufman presents the criminal justice system as a “civic seesaw,” with a turnstile. He wants peoples needs to be heard, somehow, but no one is listening, only God. This line of thought continues in stanza three.

In a universe of cells—who is not in jail? Jailers.  
In a world of hospitals—who is not sick? Doctors.  
A golden sardine is swimming in my head.  
Oh we know some things, man about some things  
Like jazz and jails and god.  
Saturday is a good day to go to jail. (22-27)

The speaker, Kaufman, questions incarceration versus freedom, sickness versus health. His head is overrun with “golden” thoughts like sardines swimming in his head. This line is the source of the title of his second collection, *Golden Sardine*.<sup>53</sup> Then once again, Kaufman leavens his serious observations with humor ironically stating, “Saturday is a good day to go to jail.”

In stanza four, surreal images express his musings and his shock at his situation. Here in jail, a “boy can be president of Muscatel” (29), and “gray-speckled unplanned nakedness; stinking/ fingers grasping toilet bowl. Mr. America wants to bathe” (31-32). This is his life now colored grey, with unplanned nakedness, stink, nastiness, a bodybuilder Kaufman thinks could be a Mr. America. It is a harsh reality. Kaufman’s angst questions. “What am I doing—feeling compassion” (35)? The kind complement turns on itself since Kaufman feels that “when he comes out of it, he will help kill me./ He

probably hates living” (36-37). These are hardened souls in this place, and the speaker is becoming one of them.

Stanza five attacks the broken American society where the jailed are the ultimate losers, and outsiders, forgotten and lost. These men jailed have “nuts, skin bolts, clanking” in their stomachs, “scrambled” like eggs (38). They are human but mechanical now because of this experience. “America” is a “windmill” “tilting itself.”(40). The speaker explains that America is a working machine, but in a balancing act. The stanza continues.

Good solid stock, the kind that made America drunk.  
Success written all over his street-streaked ass.  
Successful-type success, forty home runs in one inning,  
Stop suffering, Jack, you can’t fool us. We know.  
This is the greatest country in the world, ain’t it”  
He didn’t make it. Wino in Cell 3. (41-46)

By the end of the poem, we know that Kaufman is the “Wino,” not a junkie, not a smack head, not a coke head, a wino. His drug of choice *was* alcohol. The picture is not pretty, since a wino as a label is the lowest of drinkers. He didn’t make it because he landed in jail, again, and again. Kaufman is aware that in this great country, not everyone “makes it.” He is one of those, one suffering, and not one of those successful types.

These jailed men were good men, Americans, doing well in the American way, a surreal way here: “forty home runs in one inning.” Then Kaufman employs a direct address to these Jacks of all success. “Stop suffering, Jack, you can’t fool us,” he states as

if trying to correct himself as well. Why suffer? This is America, the greatest country in the world, which has let these jailed men and him down because too many suffer, and this one didn't make it, the wino in Cell 3. In stanza six, Kaufman's attitude changes.

There have been too many years in this short span of mine.  
My soul demands a cave of its own, like the Jain god;  
Yet I must make it go on, hard like jazz, glowing  
In this dark plastic jungle, land of long night, chilled.  
My navel is a button to push when I want inside out.  
Am I not more than a mass of entrails and rough tissue?  
Must I break my bones? Drink my wine-diluted blood?  
Should I dredge old sadness from my chest?  
Not again,  
All those ancient balls of fire, hotly swallowed, let them lie.  
Let me spit breath mists of introspection, bits of me,  
So that when I am gone, I shall be in the air. (47-58)

This is another remarkable stanza. Kaufman's self-questioning aches. In line 47, he realizes how short life is, and he seeks spiritual refuge, a "cave" of his own for protection and comfort, like the "Jain god." His reference is to a god of India. Jainism is a religion founded in India by a contemporary of Buddha. For a long time, it rivaled Buddhism and still has adherents in India. The point is he seeks divine protection where he can imagine it. Then the tone switches. His guilt and fear turn into hope and a more positive attitude. He must go on, "hard like jazz, glowing." His creativity rises up, even among this "dark plastic jungle," and "land of long night, chilled." Again, the tone switches to a contemplation of self mutilation. "Must I break my bones?" This is an effort to make physical pain replace the pain of his internal sensibility, his shame and

guilt. He is not undone. He will think more, leave “bits” of himself that will last. This is the Kaufman I met, a man who wanted people to understand who he was.

The following stanzas are fragments with some bright lights. In stanza seven, he writes: “Thank God for beatniks” (67). He is beat down, but not beat out of his mind. Stanza eight revisits the stink of jail, of “rotting people,” “gassy disgust,” and he wants to “drown” his “exposed eyes in tears” (70-71). These are powerful images, metaphors exposing his inner anxiety in memorable metaphors.

In the one-line stanza 11, he writes simply, “the baby came to jail today” (76). Kaufman is ashamed to be there, where his son must visit him behind bars. Most of the remaining stanzas are two or three lines, reviewing his hell there in jail, contemplating “the Battle of Monumental failures raging,/Both hoping for a good clean loss” (93-94). His guilt is serving a useful social function; he wants better than this. “Caught in imaginary webs of conscience,/ I weep over my acts” (101-102). He becomes so hurt, he can only recall surreal visions such as: “cities should be built on one side of the street” (103). Another mysteriously funny concept appears in the two-line stanza 23: “People who can’t cast shadows/ Never die of freckles.” Stanza 26 is an important testimony to his process for all those non-believers.

I sit here writing, not daring to stop,  
For fear of seeing what’s outside my head. (110-111)

Kaufman did write his poems, and he saved them for us. Here he presents his writing as an escape from inner turmoil. He finds affinity in a Supreme sufferer in one-line stanza 27: “There, Jesus, didn’t hurt a bit, did it” (112)? Surprisingly, and not



surprisingly, he ends in one-line stanza 34, in a surreal image: “Come, help flatten a raindrop.”

These jail poems express a physical loneliness, isolation, and haunting guilt, a guilt used for a useful purpose. Kaufman is fed up with his state of being jailed; it is too harsh. It is mean, inhumane. Yes, he takes his cue from Socrates and dialogues with himself honestly. The result is a heartfelt confession, what is good for the soul. By the end of this powerful poem, the reader sympathizes with his plight, and mourns the damage to his spirit. It is as though, these poems are an act of seeking forgiveness like a Catholic confession. We feel he will change his behavior to avoid such degradation in the future.

These poems become Kaufman's personal and political protest against his immediate situation and the larger society's hold on a people, any people, at any time. In these poems, like the "beats" of his generation, Kaufman still lives in the present of every sound of his jailer, and his own hurt. He is trapped for now, but it is not final. His words paint the reality of jail, his mistakes, and his desire to right them.

**“Abomunist Manifesto” Bob Kaufman’s Lexicon.** Kaufman’s Beat classic “Abomunist Manifesto” employs charged, original language, and jazzy style combined with a prophetic, political, and social radicalism, to influence any who will listen. To begin the inquiry this core Kaufman "beat" poem deserves, I will explore what Kaufman does with language. By examining his unique style and word coinages which together

characterize a "beat" linguistic, we can add to our understanding of the "beat generation" while uncovering the roots of Kaufman's genius. To approach Kaufman's contributions, it is necessary to look briefly at his early linguistic influences, to define the beat context within which he rose, and finally to employ the methods of both literary and linguistic analysis.

Kaufman's achievement is its own testimony. The technique of his choice was a stylized free verse, most often surreal, one infused with Praise Songs to Jazz and its musicians, to the Beats themselves, but tempered by his loneliness as a long-distance poet. The special burden of his Blackness is also of crucial importance. "Abomunist Manifesto" is Kaufman and the Beats' decree of non-conformity. In this series of eleven poems, Kaufman creates a lexicon to articulate the dissatisfaction of the disenfranchised in America, and to energize a generation beat into materialistic complacency and mediocrity. This group of poets was anti most things. The opening "Abomunist Manifesto" poem declares:

ABOMUNISTS JOIN NOTHING BUT THEIR HANDS OR LEGS,  
OR OTHER SAME.  
ABOMUNISTS SPIT ANTI-POETRY FOR POETIC REASONS  
AND FRINK.  
ABOMUNISTS DO NOT LOOK AT PICTURES PAINTED  
BY PRESIDENTS AND UNEMPLOYED PRIME MINISTERS.  
IN TIMES OF PERIL, ABOMUNISTS, AS REALITY  
AMERICANS, STAND READY TO DRINK THEMSELVES  
TO DEATH FOR THEIR COUNTRY.  
ABOMUNISTS DO NOT FEEL PAIN, NO MATTER HOW MUCH  
IT HURTS.

ABOMUNISTS DO NOT USE THE WORD SQUARE EXCEPT WHEN  
TALKING TO SQUARES. (1-13)

This opening poem of the manifesto is written in small caps throughout, as though it is meant to be read loudly, but not screamed, as all caps might imply. The typography is the first act of non-compliance with the status quo, in this case, writing standards. Manifestos are a public declaration of policy and aims. The aim here declares the philosophy of rejectionism; that is, Beats reject everything people expect as the standard quality of attainment in society. They join nothing but themselves. They spit “anti-poetry for poetic reasons.” They are anti-political representatives; and when fake leaders break the nation, abomunists-read Beats<sup>54</sup> will drink to the death for their country. Even if they hurt, they feel no pain. They are too hip to use the word square with squares. Now, ain’t that hip? The first poem continues.

ABOMUNISTS READ NEWSPAPERS ONLY TO ASCERTAIN THEIR  
ABOMUNITY.

ABOMUNISTS BELIEVE THAT THE SOLUTION OF PROBLEMS  
OF RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY IS, TO HAVE A CATHOLIC  
CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT AND A PROTESTANT CANDIDATE FOR POPE.

ABOMUNISTS DO NOT WRITE FOR MONEY; THEY WRITE  
THE MONEY ITSELF.

ABOMUNISTS BELIEVE ONLY WHAT THEY DREAM ONLY  
AFTER IT COMES TRUE.

ABOMUNIST POETS, CONFIDENT THAT THE NEW LITERARY  
FORM “FOOT-PRINTISM” AS FREED THE ARTIST  
OF OUTMODED RESTRICTIONS, SUCH AS: THE ABILITY TO  
READ AND WRITE, OR THE DESIRE TO COMMUNICATE,  
MUST BE PREPARED TO READ THEIR WORK AT DENTAL  
COLLEGES, EMBALMING SCHOOLS, HOMES FOR UNWED

MOTHERS, HOMES FOR WED MOTHERS, INSANE ASYLUMS,  
USO CANTEENS, KINDERGARTENS, AND COUNTY JAILS.  
ABOMUNISTS NEVER COMPROMISE THEIR REJECTIONARY  
PHILOSOPHY.  
ABOMUNISTS REJECT EVERYTHING EXCEPT SNOWMEN. (14-42)

These abos read the news to check their abomunity. Abos will upset the comfortable conservative right-wing world's seats of power.<sup>55</sup> Abos are rich, since they "write" all the money they need. Rejecting the literary establishments formal poetics, they invent a new form, "foot-printism" to free the artist from old restrictions such as the three "r's," and they must be prepared to star at dental colleges, embalming schools, and a host of places in which most "literary poets" would not be caught dead, such as insane asylums. Clearly, abomunists are for the underdog, the outcast of society like kindergartners and jailbirds. They never compromise, rejecting most things. They reject everything except snowmen, who don't exist. This is a riot in verse. Its goal is fun, laughing in the moment, and flipping a literary finger to anyone who thinks differently. The form, abo footprintism, is consistent until the fortieth line, when the word Abomunist is no longer capitalized, constituting perfect rejectionary philosophy.

The word, Abomunist, epitomizes Kaufman's linguistic strength, word-coinage. By simple affixing and suffexing, he turns language and meaning on its sides. Katherine V. Lindberg declares that Kaufman's "one-man movement – abomunism – sounds like abominable, as in snowman or cokeman – as in the last line of the initial poem (170). She calls this Kaufman's "playing the old game of Charades. . . that abomunism rhymes with comm-you-ism (170). Lindberg further asserts that:

. . .Kaufman, even more than other members of the beat fraternity, refuses old line or Party political engagement in a world of radical relativity and nuclear madness. Too, there's no odds in looking to Kaufman for a straight tale of race or class victimage. In the long avant-garde tradition of sticking it to the bourgeoisie, Kaufman named a movement without a foundation or members. By way of parodying avant-garde gestures, his poetry was always para-citing (171).

Lindberg is on target. Kaufman poses no sorrow songs to his heritage. When asked if he was ever communist, he replied "they ran with me, but I never ran with them." Even the avant-garde get their licks from Kaufman.

The second poem is called "Notes Dis- and Re- Garding Abomunism." Its opening stanza connects its philosophical origins to a dubious biblical source. The second poem in the series called "Notes Dis- and Re- Garding Abomunism." Here, Kaufman incorporates the use of prefixes and suffixes to make new words. As a result, Abomunist becomes Abomunism. The root, perhaps from communist is mun - ist added with abo, perhaps from abominable as Lindberg suggested. "The suffix ism may be used as an independent word, as in creeds and isms" (Pyles 286). This combining lengthens these new words. Kaufman creatively "clips" and shortens in his new lexicon. The abomunist disregards everything, but the roots of the word are curious. Abo is the Swedish name for Turku (*American Heritage* 3). It is also a classification for human blood types (*AH* 4). The "a" means the word "on" which implies connection. Munis is from the Latin for public office (*AH* 863). Or, it could be rooted in the Medieval Latin munus meaning office, duty, gift (*AH* 863). Kaufman knows his lexicon. Therefore, the credo of these Abomunists becomes a bonafide system in Abomunism. In this poem as in the others, even the avant garde get licks and an esoteric history.

Abomunism was founded by Barabbas, inspired by his dying

words: “I wanted to be in the middle, but I went too far out.” (1-3)

By attributing their historical foundation to Barabbas, they establish their outsider’s outsider platform of no ambition; and as a result, give themselves permission to be very far outside the norm. The Abo surreal message continues notes on “selling middle names to impotent personnel managers” (18). Abos even “bite their own hands after feeding themselves” (21). The abomunists “dis” themselves, as the prefix means to exclude. They also “re”-gard abomunism; that is, they are against abomunism as well. Their closing message affirms their anti-state of being.

“When attacked. Abomunists think positive, repeating over and under: “If I were a crime, I’d want to be committed. . . .

No! . . .Wait!” (29-32)

This is hilarious, pure laughter; it’s great to get such humor from so serious a poet, yet the humor proceeds from a solemn subject. The poem also reflects Kaufman’s mercurial personality. Like Thoreau, he was both a recluse and an extrovert, and knew how to make self-reflexive humor out of that paradox. This must be the real Bob Kaufman, a typical creative person who was outgoing and withdrawn.

The third poem in the series changes form completely. The broad page-stretched lines give way to a succinct 14-line poem. It boasts a note within parenthesis stating that it is an excerpt from a longer work called “Abomunism and Religion” by Tom Man, which solidifies its scholarly status. But who is Tom Man? Could this be a take on Thomas Paine’s “Rights of

Man?” Paine said that “these are the times that try men’s souls,” and the Abos are fighting for their souls. The poem is called “Further Notes.”

Krishnamurti can relax the muscles of your soul,  
Free your aching jawbone from the chewingum habit.  
Ouspensky can churn your illusions into butter and  
Give you circles to carry them in, around your head.  
Subud can lock you in strange rooms with vocal balms  
And make your ignorant clothing understand you.  
Zen can cause changes in the texture of your hair,  
Removing you from the clutches of sexy barbers.  
Edgar Cayce can locate your gallstones, other organs,  
On the anarchistic rockpiles of Sacramento.  
Voodoo Marie can give you Loas, abstract horses,  
Snorting guides to tar-aby black masses.  
Billy can plug you into the Christ machine. Mail in your  
Mind today. Hurry, bargain God week, lasts one week only. (1-14)

This time, contemporary and historic non-gurus of religion get their un-proper sales pitch. From the self-proclaimed anti-guru Krishnamurti to the Gurdjieff student, Peter Ouspensky, these abo notes will free you to not join their causes. The remarkable psychic Edgar Cayce will locate organs, but the New Orleans Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau can give you Loas or spirits of the other world. Billy Graham plugs people into a Christ machine. The only requirement is the final anti-sales pitch.

In poem four, called “\$\$ Abomunus Craxioms \$\$,” he writes:

Jazz never made it back down he river. (3)  
People who do not read are not happy.

People are not very happy.  
These days people get sicker quicker.  
The sky is less crowded in the West.  
Psychiatrists pretend not to know everything.  
Way out people know the way out.  
Laughter sounds orange at night, because  
reality is unrealizable while it exists.  
Abomunists knew it all along,  
but couldn't get the butterscotch down. (8-18).

These postulates confirm the abomunist and Beat truths; the surreal is reality. Jazz went upriver and was lost. "Laughter sounds orange at night;" abos knew this all along. This line also provides the device of synesthesia; he's asking us to hear a color. Kaufman's technique makes use of the ideational content of anti, crossing absurd comedy with philosophy to unseat the horror of complacent thinking. The pure fun of this manifesto took hold like a new flavor, tinged with the familiar. Kaufman rewrites the present, in effect comforting the afflicted and upsetting the comfortable. It is necessary then to afford more full attention to this poem overall.

In effect, the lexicon of "un" of Bob Kaufman is best expressed at the end of the first poem in the series, which is prose-like, and carries the title the "Abomunist Manifest."

Abomunist poets, confident that the new literary  
form "Foot-printism" has freed the artist  
of outmoded restrictions, such as: the ability to  
read and write, or the desire to communicate,  
must be prepared to read their work at dental  
colleges, embalming schools, homes for unwed  
mothers, homes for wed mothers, insane asylums,  
USO canteens, kindergartens, and county jails.



Abomunists never compromise their rejectionary philosophy.  
Abomunists reject everything except snowmen. (26-42)

Here, the Beat ideal so comically and un-eloquently expressed in this series poses an interesting point of inquiry into Kaufman's highly original style. It is presented as the epitome of the use of language as freedom, a key tenant of Beat philosophy; but we also have an elemental key in the Black vernacular of the mid-20th century, which is taken to the nth degree in this series. The "Abomunist Manifesto," thus explores the beat ideal while taking the Black linguistic aesthetic to a new level. Here, Kaufman breaks completely with poetics as he knows and reveres it, and eschews formal styles. His insistence on forcing language into new forms becomes a tool for parodying the notion of a manifesto, and indeed, poetry itself. This new lexicon is uniquely his, that is, a vocabulary listed in a specialized glossary, a Beat glossary.

Composed and performed in the late 50s, Kaufman's "Abomunist Manifesto" embodies the evolution of the speech act, a crucial example of the challenge of language to transcend form. This poem is not about transcendence of language, but language as a catalyst for human social awareness and thereby human social experience to change for something new, beyond the norm. Bob Kaufman's Abomunism becomes a speech-act, one that flips mainstream linguistic tradition, and as a result, mainstream social and poetic tradition. Like the Beat project, it is oppositional in construct, intent, performance, and message.

For Douglas Robinson, "at issue in the debate over speech acts is whether language is be conceived as essentially a system of structures and meanings or as a set of acts and practices" (683). Originally introduced by J.L. Austin, "speech-act theory moves the focus of the critic's

attention from the ‘text,’ conceived formalistically as a stable object with certain intrinsic characteristics, to what we *do* with texts—as writers, readers, editors, publishers. . . . In the broadest sense, every literary act is a speech act” (Robinson 683). In a nutshell, the debate for linguists and critics is the logic of language versus the rhetoric of language. Austin created the notions of the “constative,” an utterance used for “stating” thing, for conveying information, and the “performative,” an utterance for doing things, in a context of narrative statements (Robinson 684). Later, Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, rejected these distinctions, because he came to feel that constatives also perform. He then explored the operation of language, not just as it is used in the mind abstractly, but also “in the give-and-take of real interpersonal speech-use situations” (Robinson 684). Austin’s approach to language ideologically opposes standard linguistic logic.

John Searle , the author of “Logical Status,” on literary speech act, advanced Austin’s work on Speech Acts, using St. Augustine’s *On Christine Doctrine*: “I am arguing, however, “ Searle wrote, “that an adequate study of speech acts is a study of *langue*” (17), which is to say, transcendental structure (Robinson 684).

Subsequently, Chomskyan linguist Jerrold Katz, rather than linking the performative with performance, set performance to one side, just as the logical tradition does, and focused on language as a vehicle for the communication of information (Robinson 684), a de-contextualization. Austin played with rules, asked more questions than he could answer, and proliferated real-life counterexamples even (or especially) when their effect was to undermine his own classifications (Robinson 685). All this is relevant to what Bob Kaufman does in verse. For Searle and Katz, Austin is mistaken; he meant to stick to the rules of logic but was unable to do

so (Robintin 685). In “Signature Event Context,” Jacques Derrida deconstructs Austin’s ideal on the basis that there is a “constative” (stating) or logical exclusion in Austin’s argument that undermines the explanatory power of speech-act theory (Robinson 685). Austin rejects “figurative” or “poetic” language as “performative utterance. . . hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy. . . .” and calls it “‘*parasitic*’ on its normal use. . . all of which (he) excludes from consideration” (22).

[Searle and Derrida debated or boxed on this parasitic language issue, while Derrida demonstrates that Searle is philosophically closer to Derrida on this than not. In his “Limited Inc” discussion of parasitic language, Derrida modifies Austin’s terms. For Derrida, “serious” speech acts are in fact and by rights grounded in the very possibility of linguistic parasitism, or “iterability”; “A standard act depends on as much upon the possibility of being repeated, and thus potentially [*éventuellement*] of being mimed, feigned, cited, played, stimulated, parasited, etc., as the later possibility depends upon the possibility said to be opposed to it” (91-92). Modifying Austin’s terms again, we might say that a “serious” speech act *as* an act depends upon the possibility of being performed, that the stable or static (“constative”) form of a “serious” (non-marginal, non-defective, etc.) act of promising, say, only exists as a fictive construct generated by the speaker/actor in the act of performing it. This would suggest that there is no substantial difference between promising on stage and promising in “real life” ; both are performances of speech acts that the speaker/actor has witnessed and internalized as the ways other speakers/actors have of saying/doing a thing (promising, say), but which are realized *acts* only in the performing or “iterating” of them. This suggests Bakhtin’s theory of internal dialogism: every word we hear and speak is a repetition or reenactment of previous uses that is both saturated with earlier dialogues (Derrida would again say “iterability”) and inclined toward a specific situational response from a real listener, and thus always both the “same” (dialogization as imaginary “essence”) and “different” (dialogization as contextual act). (Robinson 685)

What does this have to do with Bob Kaufman’s Abomunist Manifesto? In the language act, speech operates as though we are acting, repeating lines, what in Austin is called parasitic,

and we live, read, understand by a script, the script of language, what Robinson calls “a socially regulated pattern for our behavior, but in dynamic, situationally contingent ways. We roughly follow the script, but because the script never quite specifies every detail in every scene, we also constantly ad-lib, and in some sense, because the script is multiple and our memories are bad, we ad-lib the script itself” (685).

While Derrida’s deconstruction of Austin’s parasitic language is persuasive, it is H. Paul Grice in his 1975 article “Logic and Conversation” who asks how is it possible to imply things, to convey intended meanings that we do not make explicit? For Grice, implied speech acts break the rules in a controlled fashion, with assumptions and expectations to speech situations (Robinson 686). Grice, in an effort to formalize “rules” and “maxims” for human speech, introduces the notion of “cooperative principle.” These “cooperative principles” [to provide all sufficient but no excess information and to be truthful, relevant, and perspicuous] or ideological norms have been programmed into the white middle class for the past century or two, especially the male members of that class (Robinson 686). Robinson calls these “conversational universals” or the voice of the dominant “we” (686). This notion dismisses “irrational” speech acts, blind rages, oneiric discourse (sleep and dream talk), “uncooperative” speech acts, deliberate attempts to disrupt conversations, lies and cons, and pouting silences (Robinson 686).

For Robinson, Grice’s model opens up exciting new methodological avenues and can explain the operation of what Austin and Searle call parasitic speech acts, such as metaphorical and literary language, or jokes. One of Grice’s examples; a General who has attacked the town of Sind, wires back to headquarters: “Peccavi,”

Commander realizes that he can't possibly mean the literal translation, "I have sinned," since that would be irrelevant to the battle being fought. The general in the field is good, classically trained military man, best schools, long training in military discipline—rationalism and cooperation—ideologically "normal" masculinity; he must be adhering to the cooperative principle and its maxims; therefore implying something that he is not saying outright. He quickly makes the translations and interprets the telegraph to mean "I have Sind," that is, "I have conquered the town." (Robinson 686)

Robinson agrees that in Grice's theory of "conversational implications" (ideologically "normal" discourse), we agree to analyze the rationally cooperative speech of white middle-class males and ignore that of everyone else—is an effective tool, but a serious limitation (686).

Robinson further's Derrida's "implicature" that is "that all 'maxims' situationally and interpretively depend on implicature: We construct maxims, in this reading in specific speech-use situations, a shifting interpretive fiction that help us to make tentative (never perfectly reliable) guesses at that the other person is trying to say. In this way, Robinson revises Grice's theory of implications and Austin's theory of illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect by stating that Grice's examples deal with implicit constatives, or what might be called "locutionary implicature": conveying information in a round-about way. Isn't this what wordsmiths do? In Robinson's modifications of speech-act theory, the poet is not just stating or performing but doing something, attempting to sway readers in certain ways: for Walt Whitman and Bob Kaufman, urging the readers to carry the banner of democracy, (illocutionary implicature), and attempting to goad readers into action (perlocutionary implicature). Beatniks in Kaufman become the anti-ideal, transformed into a new norm that is anti-convention, and thus against the "normal" thereby accepted.

Kaufman felt the need to turn norms on their head because of the Cold War craziness of

the 1950s. The word itself, Abomunist, is an obvious take on the notion of Communism, the political pariah of the 1950s. Communism fueled the “red scare” of 1950s America and the resultant reactionary politics of the McCarthy era, which was expressed on local levels in the rousting of Beatniks by police on a regular basis, which in turn added to the anti-Beat propaganda of *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen and others. The term Beatnik itself is often attributed to Bob Kaufman because of his known word-coinage, but history attributes it to Herb Caen; and when he mentioned Beatniks, it was not a compliment.

Historically, the “Abomunist Manifesto” was not obscure but rather highly popular. It appeared in this, his first collection of verse; but it originally came out in its entirety as a broadside published by City Lights Books.<sup>56</sup> The “Abomunist ” poems’ popularity reached national proportions when they appeared in the November 30<sup>th</sup> issue of *Life* magazine in an article entitled “The Only Rebellion Around.”

In “Abomunist Manifesto,” Kaufman creates a lexicon to articulate the dissatisfaction of the disenfranchised in America, the generation Beat into materialistic complacency and vapid awareness. As novelist John Clellon Holmes articulates in defining “The Philosophy of the Beats,” “They groped, they lurched, they hitchhiked toward something they believed in” (158). Holmes asserts

Kerouac’s insistence that actually they were on a quest, and that the specific object of their quest was spiritual. Though they rushed back and forth across the country on the slightest pretext, gathering kicks along the way, their real journey was inward; . . . ‘The beat generation,’ Kerouac said, ‘is basically a religious generation.’ And later, in another interview, Kerouac amplified: ‘This includes anyone from fifteen to fifty-five who digs everything. We’re not Bohemian, remember. Beat means beatitude, not beat up. You feel this. You feel it in a beat, in jazz—real cool jazz or a good gutty rock number’ (160).

In “Abomunist Manifesto,” Kaufman provides a stylistic manifestation of what the Beats thought they were. This poetic manifesto is a speech act for which we must as Ludwig Wittgenstein insists in *Philosophical Investigations* suggests that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (remark 43).

It was this type of spontaneity that attracted Kaufman’s poet contemporaries to him. John Cellon Holmes states: “all of them believed that only that which cries to be said, only that which is unalterably true to the sayer, and bursts out of him in a flood, is worth saying in the first place” ( 162), and Holmes further says that “Everywhere the Beat Generation seems occupied with the feverish production of answers—some of them frightening, some of them foolish—to a single question: how are we to live”(160)? In “Abomunist Manifesto,” Kaufman is attempting to answer just such a question in his prescription of unbelonging.

Linguistically then, Bob Kaufman takes a well-known term that raises fear, ire, and mystery and assigns it a meaning of his own invention, which is symptomatic of his and the Beats’ concern to express themselves more freely. Little has been written expressly on the subject of Kaufman’s style, but one can easily conclude from even a cursory reading of his poems, that “Abomunist Manifesto” is a fresh departure from his whole thinking about language, style, and words. John McClelland [to whom I owe a great debt for this linguistic approach though the development and conclusions are my own] in writing on André Gide’s novel, *Les Caves du Vatican*, asserts that Old words and structures are not adaptable to new patterns of thought and action (257). As a result, in this series, Kaufman

means to reject the currently accepted literary language, to free oneself of its restrictions by seeking a more intensely individual mode corresponding the

writer's own subjective conceptions, to be, at least hesitantly, a linguistic revolutionary. In short, to make language the servant of thought and feeling rather than constraining the latter to the former. The result may be mannered or contrived by remains nonetheless an attempt to affirm creative liberty. (McClelland 257)

In an effort to flesh out the extent of Kaufman's lexical acumen, an overview of the other poems in the series is needed. Bob Kaufman's lexical innovations are most easily observed and analyzed in the less striking fifth poem where the new ideal get abundant realization; it is called "Excerpts from the Lexicon Abomunon."

*At election time, Abomunists frink more, and naturally, as hard-core Abo's, we feel the need to express ourselves somewhat more abomunally than others. We do this simply by not expressing ourselves (abomunization). We do not express ourselves in the following terms:*

Abommunity: n. Grant Avenue & other frinky places.

Abomunarcosis: n.. Addiction to oatmeal cookies & liverwurst. (1-7)

While all these derivatives are unfamiliar to readers, Kaufman has a fun time borrowing from loaded words like community and biological diseases as in -cosis, Abomusical: n. Diggable sounds.. The result is a lexicon whose definitions are comprehensible. On other occasions, Kaufman uses words with an apparent disregard for their accepted definition such as providing the abo ideal as a verb, then an unlikely synonym to it. "Abomuicate: v. To dig.(Slang; to frink)" (14). Toward the end of the poem, Kaufman writes that "fink" is also a verb, but he provides meaning for it. "Frink: v. To (censored) n. (censored) and (censored)" (44). These new words, in this case, verbs, are turned into "isms," those establishment attached standards even for these anti-establishment slang words. Therefore, he ends the poem with the verb now a noun. "Frinkism: n. A sub-cult of Abomunism, not authorized nor given abomunitude" (45-46). In the



last full line, he makes frink an adjective. “Finky: adj. Like (censored)” (47). He signs this poem “by Bimbgo,” the male counter of bimbo perhaps, again, for fun, least we take him too seriously.

Each new word is given its assigned part of speech; it is listed as a dictionary definition, and the only thing certain is the abomunist aversion to butterscotch. Imagine, instead of assigning *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* in Freshman Comp, Kaufman’s *Lexicon of Surreality*? It is here that Kaufman is truly an inventor, using his incredible wit and outright humor to mirror an “anti-philosophy” that “realizes the limits of all -isms, the eventual decay of all systems” (Christian 112). If isms are no longer sacred, neither are manifestos, axioms, lexicons, or newscasts. All is held up for ridicule. Sense is made of nonsense, a “tanfastic” sun appears. The Abomunist is anti-everything established, placing Kaufman squarely as a precursor of the Black Arts Movement, the hippie movement, and the women’s liberation.

Bob Kaufman’s stylistic operates on two levels: The desired reader’s response is wholesale acceptance, international fame for the poet, and (parasitic) reprints. Kaufman’s reliance on a specialized lexicon does not alter but confirms and informs and is thus constative and performative of the understanding of Beat culture. He provides the codes to his message, and as a result he decodes Beat ethics. He is content to leave the mystery unsolved. The situations Kaufman provides are willfully sarcastic and cause the reader to encounter comic irony as well as surreal vision. Readers smile because Kaufman “closes the gap between the legitimate context and the one” he creates (McClelland 260). These new words become an illustration of the Beat milieu. Beat self doubt is Kaufman’s self doubt, which is reflected here in this lexicon that is an “unstable stylistic level where vocabulary ranges from the improper to the inaccurate”

(McClelland 260).

There are no straightforward contexts here; and as a result, comic irony is sufficient. Bob Kaufman's "Abomunist Manifesto" is a grand speech act (revolocutionary implicature) in poetics. The vocabulary Kaufman creates is a useful device turning on itself, meaning against meaning, naming against naming, combining parody to "create a world so unreal as to be a constant mockery of itself" (McClelland 261). As readers then, the Abomunist Manifesto is not logical but a rhetorical speech act, persuasive from beginning to end, naming and un-naming beat ideals.

**BOB KAUFMAN, a brief linguistic biography.** Surely, as a wordsmith, Kaufman's origins and basic life experiences exert a substantial effect on the literary works he created. While not considered a southern poet, Kaufman's Louisiana beginnings do surface in his published works, often through street and place names, for example the poem, "Rue Miro," the poem names the New Orleans street on which Kaufman was born. The semi-tropical foliage, the Galvez greens, are there and afford a sense of place.

A WET PLACE, OF HOT RAINS, & YELLOWED LONG LEAF  
PLANTS, NAMED FOR A BROKEN SUN KING, LOUISIANA,  
RHYMES WITH YESTERDAY, GONE, PAST, MOVED ON,  
GHOSTLY, BROWN WISHES . . . (*Ancient Rain* 10-14)

It is the poet's memories of a lush, moist, historical place, a place he's left but one that still lingers with him. Like the tropical ambience, Kaufman's exotic parentage is typical of the Creolized New Orleans heritage. The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* incorrectly states that Kaufman's "great-grandmother came to the United States on a slave ship from the Gold coast of Africa" (275). Born on April 18, 1925 in New Orleans, Kaufman was the son of a German

Orthodox-Jewish father and a Martiniquean mother, and the "third youngest of thirteen" siblings (*DBL* 275). Of course, the parentage is not literally true, as indicated in the biographical information clarified earlier. The Creolized result, Kaufman's early language, cultural, and religious influences were an amalgamation of attending Catholic Masses with his mother, imagined Sabbath Synagogue services with his father, "learning about the voodoo beliefs of his grandmother" (*DBL* 275), and hearing from everyone else in New Orleans about the legendary Marie Laveau, the Voodoo Queen.<sup>57</sup> This cultural and religious patchwork is easily identifiable within the literary works Kaufman creates. He is acutely sensitive to the then historically buried Black origins in Africa, and equally pays equal tribute to African contributions in America with his constant hailing of the Jazz idiom, its improvisations which he attempts to capture in words, or his praise of Black musicians in poems like "Blues note," the Praise Poem to Ray Charles, explicated earlier in this chapter.

In these lines, Kaufman is thoroughly a "beat" poet and at once thoroughly Black. He does not ignore his heritage nor slight its contributions to culture. His diction, too, is pervasively spread with the Black American experience in an earthy, comfortable, and natural way long before the "Black is beautiful" emphasis of the 1960s. He also embraces his Jewish past, and is often deeply moved by historical pain like the holocaust in poems such as "Sullen Bakeries of Total Recall."

Sometimes I feel the ones who escaped the ovens where  
Germans shall forever cook their spiritual meals are  
leaning against my eyes. (*Solitudes* 1-3)

While there are numerous such references to the Jewish experience, there are no obvious Yiddish or Hebrew words evident in the *Solitudes* collection. Yet it is certain that Kaufman's linguistic and cultural beginnings are forever present in his poetic language and combine to create a unique fabric whose images that intersect with the surreal but are bound in Black wit and a radical manifesto of historical awareness and aches.

It is clear then that as early as the 1950s, it was Kaufman's original approach to language, his committed, vocal, and radical anti-war assertions, as well as his stark criticisms of America--from pollution to a mushrooming materialism, made Kaufman a direct precursor to the political awareness and consciousness-raising expressions existing in the Black poetry of the 1960s and a major Beat idealist.

## Chapter 4: The Intertextual “Hawk Lawler Chorus”

*Knowing how to play an instrument is the barest superficiality if one is thinking of becoming a musician. It is the ideas that one utilizes instinctively that determine the degree of profundity an artist reaches.(71)*

LeRoi Jones, *Black Music*

Primarily a poet, Bob Kaufman published his first fiction as a City Lights Broadside in 1960 entitled "Does The Secret Mind Whisper?" "The Secret Mind..." is actually the beginning of a surreal novel. This fiction followed two very popular Kaufman broadsides also published by City Lights Books: *Abomunist Manifesto*, and *Second April*, both published in 1959; both poems were intensely popular. The "Manifesto" was considered essential for any Beat for its irreverent comments on the status quo, its original linguistic gusto, and its rejection of materialistic and bourgeois mores. At this time, Kaufman was actively pushing the "only cooperative project of prominent Beats," a journal entitled *Beatitude* (Warren French). *Beatitude* was co-founded with Allen Ginsberg, John Kelly, and William Margolis in the spring of 1959. According to Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufman was the driving force behind the journal which sought to provide a more immediate print resource for the many writers on the scene. Kaufman's next work of fiction appeared in 1970 in *New Directions* #17; the work is entitled "Hawk Lawler: Chorus."

The appearance of "Hawk Lawler: Chorus" is significant for Bob Kaufman for these reasons: 1. this fiction appeared some 15 years after the death of Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, the namesake of his son and the object of Praise Poems and allusions in his work; 2. this was during the period of Kaufman's Buddhist vow of silence brought on by his disappointment with the death of John Fitzgerald Kennedy; 3. Kaufman's first two collections of poetry were both in print during this time: the first, *Solititudes Crowded With Loneliness*, by New Directions in 1964, and the second *The Golden Sardine*, by City Lights in 1967. This was the time when Bob Kaufman was firmly established as the "quintessential Jazz Poet." While earlier verse master Langston Hughes paved the way with his pioneering use of Jazz language and Negro colloquial speech into poetry, and was throughout the decade of the 50s still a vital poetic force, Hughes was more of the Louis Armstrong of poetry, more heavily imbedded in traditional blues lyrics. According to Alphonso Hawkins, "World War I created the New Negro."<sup>58</sup> World War I, led to changes in the American economic and social American climate, then new jobs created social movements which facilitated the Harlem Renaissance, into the fusion and development of Black Art, Aesthetics, Jazz music, and Blues/Jazz into poetry, and our own Langston Hughes, the International Negro Poet Laureate. Similarly, World War II, with its returning Veterans and hunger for the new, created the Bebop Black Jazzman. As Hawkins says, "the Blues expresses the pain and struggle of Black people, and Jazz was its agent." But by the end of World War II, Jazz was revolutionized by an intense desire for original approaches to sound, by breaking the expected boundaries of notes, chords, and harmony, and by improvisation. Bob Kaufman, unlike Hughes, was a product of the new Jazz. As a result, what Langston Hughes is to the Blues, Bob Kaufman is to Bebop Jazz in poetry.

While it is not clear when the "Hawk Lawler: Chorus" was written, it reveals important insights into Bob Kaufman's evolutionary concerns and craft. In this fiction, Kaufman combines surreal humor and imagery, and an attempt to define the origin of the Black Beat Aesthetic in its emanation as Charlie "Bird" Parker. For Hawk Lawler is surely Charlie Parker. Like Parker, Hawk is the quintessential Black Jazzman, in his originality, his struggles, his paradoxes, and his genius.

Kaufman's story "Hawk Lawler: Chorus" opens with an omniscient narrator relating biographical events. Hawk was born in Kansas City in a "charity ward," grew up Negro, attended school, where he was quick, and he and his friends collected food at the "relief depot." Churchgoing, he sang hymns and liked them, but not the words. He played the triangle in the school band, feeling the force of playing at wrong intervals. His teacher was an "ex-New Orleans musician that jazz passed by." Then he discovered the saxophone. His only possession was a bike awarded him like relief clothes, but the bicycle was quickly traded for a "battered saxophone" which "he slept with three nights" before trying it. Soon, he is playing in local dives where he is fired often. Finally, he makes it to Harlem where he hears sounds—"strange melodic numbers." Finding a nameless girl proves easier than getting a room, and his sax creates a new kind of music that takes listeners to a new "unpromised" land. Finally, drugs do him in, making us wonder how he succeeded in the first place.

If on the surface nothing much happens, and at first reading the main and only character Hawk is static, one cannot dismiss the fire and romance lying underneath. "Hawk Lawler: Chorus" is filled with humorous and surreal insights into the plight and drama of all serious Jazz musicians. In only four tight paragraphs with images reading like an André Bréton recollection,

Bob Kaufman imagines the beginnings of a Jazzman genius while mourning the loss of the great one; and as the narrator says, "wondering from where it came."

As the new Bebop sound emerged after World War II, the children of such a period were bred in the 1930s of the depression, a lean time for anyone, especially Jim Crowed Negroes.

Kaufman places Hawk in

attendance at a seedy run-down school, daily salutes to the flag, solemn morning pledges of allegiance, and standard Beard Geographies. (225)

This Negro life is an American life replete with national training and standard public educational preparations. We discover Hawk has a "special interest in history" which "led him to build a makeshift log cabin in his back yard in preparation for the presidency." In one line Kaufman invokes the comical; and in this case, it is due to what Lawrence Levine labels absurdity (311). It is more likely that a kid might attempt to build a tree house than a log cabin, and the circumstance is rendered more inane by Hawk's preparation for the presidency. This fantasy projects a common dream of American boys, but is no more nonsensical than the system of denial from which it is born. As a result, humor in Kaufman serves as what humor theorist John Dollard calls "an incisive commentary upon reality from the vantage point of black consciousness" (Levine 313). This image and humor is furthered when Hawk's "father tore down (the cabin) for firewood as soon as he discovered what motivated Hawk." Here Kaufman presumes a creative spirit broken by a, perhaps, jealous or mean father figure. Yet, this early attempt to squash the creative spirit is quickly dismissed and leaves little lasting pressure as Hawk continues about his chores of traveling to the "relief depot to collect the family ration of potatoes and dried prunes." Hawk is now caught between surviving a damaged creative spirit and



poverty. In the following lines, we find Hawk

good in math but hated to do figures on paper. He usually worked out arithmetic problems in his head long before the rest of the class rested their pencils (225).

The result for Hawk is a quick mind at an early age, perhaps because he was forced by circumstance or a God-given gift. Not an untypical Negro child, Hawk

attended church each Sunday at the Rising Sun Baptist Church where he secretly sang hymns in numbers, because he didn't like hearing the same words all the time, yet could offer no resistance to the music (226).

Now we get to know a Hawk Lawler who from the first is interested in the new and is already translating the music he hears into his own version of what music should be.

Like many youth, Hawk's introduction to secular music is in the school band. He is handed a triangle to play and can feel the

tingle separate and distinct from the other instruments," Kaufman writes, "at which times he would smile inside his mouth--while apologizing to the leader who was an ex-New Orleans musician that jazz passed by, yet secretly enjoyed the hard head (226).

The more subtle humor where Hawk "would smile inside his mouth" is a surreal take on the inversion and incongruity inherent in Black humor.<sup>59</sup> And in this passage, Hawk furthers his romance with music when he plays his first instrument under the direction of his first teacher, one from the birthplace of Jazz--New Orleans. Hawk "secretly enjoyed him," Kaufman states. Is this the result of that early broken creative drive, to hide pleasure, even a smile? Hawk discovers the saxophone and never touches another triangle. In the next lines, Hawk is still "pregnant with poverty" and gains a prized

Elgin bicycle he received at Christmas from the Afro-American Doll and Toy Fund sponsored by the local Negro paper and provided for by all good white people of the town. It was given to him during a bleak Roosevelt Christmas for winning the school's annual composition contest. His subject was "Why I want to be President," and he was proudest when the bike was presented to him by a snow-bearded colored Santa Claus, whom he recognized as the Mayor's chauffeur. (226-227)

Here, Kaufman's humor is related to the humor of absurdity; but as Lawrence Levine says, it "reveals the gap between appearance and actuality or what Anton Zijderveld calls "unmasking functions" (312). Though a "cherished trophy," this bike "he surrendered to Horton, son of the family is mother washed for, in return for one battered saxophone."

We follow the neophyte's blowing in small local Blues clubs where he is fired repeatedly because he messes up the gig by playing unfamiliar riffs, literally playing his own tunes in speeds with which the other musicians could not keep time. Like Parker, Hawk's genius is sometimes missed by musicians and audiences. Finally he makes it to Harlem to the famous

Theresa Hotel. . .where he had never seen so many Negroes at one time in his whole life. He wondered if some big dam had burst in Africa and spilled its contents, or laughed at the crazy thought that they were all white and this was some special holiday when they all wore black and brown faces for some religious Mardi Gras (227).

This surrealism is less Bréton and more the visual strangeness of a Salvadore Dali painting--for Kaufman gives us these Negroes spilling from a burst dam in Africa, or the masquerading of Mardi Gras as some sick joke Harlem plays on him. In this vein, Kaufman leans on the stereotype of black-faced minstrels and caricatures them, while he inverts the reality of Harlem to an African explosion of people. Inversion and caricature are indeed at the heart of Black humor according to Levine (306-307). Kaufman continues:

This speculation was soon replaced by sounds smacking into his eardrums which dispelled any notions of masquerade, causing him to finger his case and peer into doorways for that big hidden jazz womb, oozing blues and down warmth, welcome as new shoes...(227).

Kaufman presents the image of the "big hidden jazz womb, oozing blues and down warmth, welcome as new shoes" as something Hawk imagines is attainable long before he knows what it is. This is at the heart of the surreal, the imagined reality and possibility, something fantastic or simple as new shoes yet equally powerful. For Hawk, these sounds become

Strange melodic numbers whose sum total was the blues and so personal no Arab would have acknowledged inventing them--his numbers, each one a fragment of a note. (227-229)

Here Hawk and Kaufman call for the origin of Jazz in the Blues idiom and then proceed to boast in hyperbole beyond the historical record. For Hawk Lawler's numbers are original, "each one a fragment of a note," something like splitting atoms and recreating what we could not see or in this case what we could not hear prior to his sounding of them. It is this splitting of notes, the hallmark of Charlie Parker's style that introduces Bird, as he is affectionately called, as an obvious intertextual parallel to the character of Hawk Lawler. Other similarities hold while others do not.

Like Hawk, Charlie was born in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1920 and lived in a Kansas suburban neighborhood. Unlike Hawk, Charlie's father, born in Mississippi, was a touring singer and dancer on the T.O.B.A. circuit—a substandard chain of theaters organized in 1911. The full name was Theater Owners Booking Association, but performers called it Tough on Black Asses (Gary Giddins 24-25) A drinker, his father eventually left home and landed as chef on the

Pullman Line which kept him away from home. Parker was primarily raised by his mother Addie Parker. It was when they later moved to Missouri, where he did well at Crispus Attucks Public School before registering for Lincoln High School in 1932. Unlike Hawk,

his first saxophone was a gift from his mother. It was a used alto she bought for \$45.00; she invested and repaired it, but his interest waned. In his freshmen year, Charlie was encouraged to join the school's marching band by its locally celebrated bandmaster, Alonzo Lewis, whose students already numbered among Kansas City's professional musicians. He was first assigned an alto horn, but he switched to baritone horn. It was while associating with Mr. Lewis' prize pupils, notably pianist Lawrence Keyes of the band The Deans of Swing, that Charlie practiced his alto with a vengeance. (Giddins 29-31)

Interestingly, like Hawk Lawler, Parker was kicked out of many sessions because his initial playing was poor, due to self-taught techniques that would be honed by practicing around the clock, an average of thirteen hours a day, and by “sitting in” anywhere he could to gain experience. In *Celebrating Bird, The Triumph of Charlie Parker*, Gary Giddins recalls a jam session in Kansas City in 1936 when Count Basie finished the last set.

New Orleans' Jo Jones was on drums, and Charlie Parker was in to hear Lester Young. Sitting in on sets was like graduating according to Jo Jones, and Charlie jumped in Jones' jam session and played a couple of faltering choruses at a racing tempo. Jones hit a bell to signal him to bow out. He didn't take the hint, so Jones lifted the cymbal off its stand and sent it crashing at Parker's feet. Parker left amid cruel laughter, vowing to return and show them up. ( 65)

Soon, his ability was unequalled. So Charlie Parker is without a doubt the model for Hawk Lawler. And the incongruities do not create an unreliable narrator. For Bob Kaufman is after a larger message here. Hawk Lawler is also the Jazzman genius, perhaps like a John Coltrane. The new Jazz and the men who played it spilled into American life and changed all it touched. Bebop represented freedom from the traditional jazz of Swing. Bebop was music played new in

bent notes, improvised over melody and between harmony. The new music represented innovation and freedom. Jazz was no longer simply the Black musician's self-expression; instead, Jazz as Bebop became a motif for expressing man 's transcendence of his historical and personal anguish. Bebop Jazz and its innovators are at the heart of the Beat Aesthetic; their foundation of freedom of expression and a new way of seeing and being became an uprising in American music and life. Kaufman ends the story “Hawk Lawler: Chorus,” by having the unnamed narrator sum up the life of Hawk Lawler. :

We all know he led, tough we don't all know how--some of us are more familiar with the intermissions, aware of the passions, privy to the junk, witnesses to the uprising when the handkerchief was cast off; some of us were counters of madhouse excursions, and few of us have withstood the silence, wondering from where it came. Some of us have to know. (228)

Bob Kaufman surely meant his story “Hawk Lawler” to be a tribute to Bird's genius, and a tribute to his contribution to the uprising of the Beats, of the glory of their aesthetic, and the resonance of their art that lasts. In this short story, Kaufman demonstrates again that his aesthetic is both Black and Beat.

## Chapter 5: Comments and Conclusion

*Abomunist poetry, in order to be compleatly (Eng. sp.)  
understood, should be eaten . . . except on fast days,  
slow days, and mornings. . .*

Bob Kaufman

What Kaufman is remembered for is continuing the Jazz poetry tradition and creating *the* Beat manifesto. Bob Kaufman celebrated Jazz music as a creative vehicle. Like Langston Hughes, Bob Kaufman drew appreciative audiences from people in clubs and coffee houses long before critics were aware of his poetry. While Hughes, too, was a Jazz poet, his rhythms are more reminiscent of the Blues. Hughes is credited with raising Black speech and vernacular to the level of art. Unlike Hughes, Bob Kaufman is to Black poetry what Charlie Parker is to Black music, specifically Jazz. Kaufman struck a new, surrealist chord that challenged all that is traditional in society and the government; he was rebellious in his attacks on oppression of any kind. His work fits no easy rubric; his work and life were a wake-up call to the lethargy of American letters. His memorable images are powerfully metaphorical and Surreal, not the Dadaist automatic writing surreal, but an American Surreal, challenging the status quo, criticizing Government hypocrisy, while turning the ordinary melody of poetics on its ear. He had a sensibility bleeding from eyes that witnessed the horror of power blown out of control, saw the attempted annihilation of people by sheer force, and experienced personally the police state

American style, nevertheless finding hope in creativity, finding solace in family and the American given of free speech, and self analysis for the purpose of change and understanding.

I hope that readers took some delight in my reading the “south” in Kaufman. He incorporates his New Orleans biographical and cultural details into a surreal poetic. In the same manner, he treats his Black identity with pride and appreciation, embracing his roots whole heartedly, placing his cultural foundation firmly as a bridge, influenced by the Harlem Renaissance and anticipating the Black Arts Movement.

I have attended to the details of Kaufman’s life in order to prepare reader to distinguish the man from the popular and often incorrect legend of the poet. I hope my research will answer questions, set some records straight, and aid others toward a full-fledged biography which is needed. For the most part, he was an exceptional Negro man of his day. He lived life to the fullest, loved his family and friends, and had many misfortunes as well as significant extraordinary successes and rare experiences. Most importantly, contrary to popular myth, he really did write his poems down on anything handy, and he did save his work to share. This is why Raymond Foye found Kaufman’s poems in a Moroccan leather briefcase, one of the only items not burned in that fire in his apartment; these poems became the collection *The Ancient Rain*. He was an outstanding performer of poetry with the unique ability to “improvise” at will, including the work of literary masters within his readings of his own works. During his young life, he worked for the National Maritime Union, and he co-founded *Beatitude*, the only multi-cultural Beat journal. He was not and never was a Communist. About that, he said, “they ran with me, but I never ran with them.” Still, there is so much more to this man that needs to be unearthed; so more scholarship is needed in this area.

My dissertation focuses on the major and significant poems in Kaufman's first collection. The shorter of those poems are classified according to theme and form. The longer series are explicated under their own umbrella as they are extraordinary lyrics.<sup>60</sup> There is a need for such study on the subsequent works for a more thorough assessment of Kaufman's work. T.J. Anderson suggests that Kaufman's second collection, *Golden Sardine*, is his best work of the three collections. I disagree, but only through thorough examination of all three books can their various merits be ascertained. In my estimation, in his first collection discussed here, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*, the genius of Bob Kaufman emerges forcefully. This collection is full of excellent poems in the Beat and Black literary camps, and all of them are memorable. There are at least a dozen very short poems in *Solitudes* which are more like fragments; for my purpose here, I consider them minor poems. Further scholarship may reevaluate these. Certainly, his third collection, *Ancient Rain*, is a more mature work and provides considerable challenges for interpretation and assessment. Such a study is surely needed.

The goal of this dissertation is to reclaim a forgotten Bob Kaufman as a significant Black and Beat poet. Although my own work as a poet is nothing like his, his unique perceptions and creations touched me deeply, and studying him more only substantiated my admiration for his gifts and urged me to continue to write about his work. In this vein, I wanted to reclaim him for the south since his roots are what struck me in my early reading of his work. Another goal was to add to our understanding of his creativity, his ability to perform orally and what that means, and to show how he bridged the Beat and Black Aesthetic movements. Finally, I wanted to proclaim that though he died, he did not stay dead for those of us who respect his work.



## End Notes

1. See her letter to me in Appendix B.
2. This article appears in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the October 1, 1999 issue.
3. The idea that Bob Kaufman would not have submitted his work for publication is a common one that will be argued later in the Biographical Chapter section “Man as Poet.”
4. Although recent scholarship, Anderson’s biographical information is sometimes inaccurate and will be addressed in that part of this dissertation.
5. Kaufman, like Whitman, saw America still forming and wished to loosen the minds of readers by blending the past and present with the future. Kaufman, like Whitman, also saw himself as representing the people; although, Whitman saw himself more as a seer, a poet with a vision who could portray the real America as forming, growing, evolving. While Kaufman saw himself as one of the masses, only one who articulated what is real in poetry but simply, though often using the surreal.
6. Three of these [“Peace be with You,” “The Trip, Dharma Trip, Sangha Trip,” and “A Buddhist Experience”] appeared earlier in the collection *Would You Wear My Eyes* by The Bob Kaufman Collective (1989).
7. See biographical section for “period of silence,” the years when Bob Kaufman took a Buddhist vow of silence.
8. My parentheses.
9. Dadaism developed in Europe after World War I, and generally “ignored logical relationship between idea and statement, argued for absolute freedom,” . . . but had “destructive intent of demolishing art and philosophy, intending to replace them with conscious madness as a protest against the insanity of the war.” “It was founded in Zurich in 1916 by TristanTzara” spread to France (Harmon and Holman 139).
10. Harold Battiste, Jr., a co-founder of A.F.O. (All For One) Records and Foundation, is a professional composer, arranger, performer and teacher. He is a native of New Orleans and a graduate of Dillard University. He joined Ellis Marsalis in 1989 on the Jazz Studies faculty at the University of New Orleans after 30 years in Los Angeles. He has been active as a publisher, producer, conductor and musical director for studio, stage, motion pictures and television with credits in jazz, classical, blues and pop.

Battiste co-produced and arranged the career-launching recordings of **Sam Cooke** (*You Send Me*), **Sonny and Cher** (*I Got You Babe*), **Joe Jones** (*You Talk Too Much*), **Barbara George** (*I Know*) and **Lee Dorsey** (*Ya Ya*). Battiste produced the first albums (*Gris Gris*, *Babylon and Gumbo*) introducing New Orleans artist Mac Rebennack as **Dr. John**. He was also the musical director for the “Sonny & Cher Show” on CBS from 1976 to 1977, and was also musical director for the Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis tour in 1977.

Battiste initiated the first African-American musician-owned record label (All For One) and publishing

company (At Last Pub. Co.). On this label, Battiste recorded the first contemporary jazz artists in New Orleans including clarinetist Alvin Batiste, drummers Ed Blackwell and James Black, saxophonists Nat Perrilliat and Alvin “Red” Tyler, and pianist Ellis Marsalis.

A.F.O. Records celebrated its **44th Birthday Bash** at Snug Harbor, 626 Frenchmen Street, on **Sunday, June 5 from 5 to 7 p.m.** A.F.O. (All For One), co-founded by music master Harold Battiste, will celebrated the lively history of modern jazz in New Orleans with some of its creators, including Ellis Marsalis and others that were a part of the A.F.O. legacy. For more information on the Foundation, please visit the website at [www.afofoundation.org](http://www.afofoundation.org).

11. Kalamu is the poet’s poet, having accomplished the feat of seeing his work appear in most major anthologies of African American literature during his life, being celebrated regularly as guest at one conference or university or another, traveling internationally to read and present his work. What a rare poetic life for an African American poet who was formed during the Black Arts Movement, to leave New Orleans once a month and the country once a year, his motto.

12. This information is not listed in the biographical section since it has relevance to the “allegations” and definitions regarding Kaufman.

13. Special thanks to Dr. Michael Brady, Clinical Psychologist, formerly with Dillard University for his excellent recommendations of appropriate and salient scientific articles on eidetikers, and for explaining to me.

14. *Umbra* was edited by Tom Dent. Thomas Covington Dent was the son of Albert Dent, former president of Dillard University, an Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in New Orleans. His mother, Jessie Covington Dent, was a concert pianist during the 20s and 30s. Growing up on that Black university campus place Dent into contact with the foremost Negro intellectuals and artists of the time.

15. *Creole* is a term that has changed over time; even today, the definition remains controversial. Few agree on the term’s exact meaning; it’s use is easier to define. According to the *Louisiana Almanac*,

“The word *Creole*, in one definition, refers to a person who is a pure white descendant of French or Spanish ancestry or of both. The term can also refer to a native-born person who speaks French or Spanish and is descended from colonial days; therefore, he may be of any race. As an adjective it has applied to their manners, usages, inventions, etc., as *Creole* customers, *Creole* lettuce, *Creole* cooking, and so forth. Now, more often, it is used to describe anything native to this area, as in *Creole* tomatoes.

Alexander Dimitry, New Orleans scholar, wrote, ‘As early as 1520, Criollo (Creole) was invented by the Conquistadors to distinguish their pure-blooded offsprings, born in the colonies of South America or the Indies, from children of mixed blood born in the mother country.’

The French adopted the Spanish word and changed it to “*Creole*.” Jean Bossu in his *Travels in North America* wrote in 1751, ‘The Creoles are those that are born here of a French man and A French woman or of European parents’” (109-110).

It is common knowledge that about a third of Louisiana's population is of French descent, added to that those of Spanish and Italian descent, and their generations here retaining the culture and language are referred to as *Creole* whether Black or white.

16. See Appendix for Bob Kaufman's genealogical tree listing all siblings in order of their birth, as well as maternal and paternal heritage as far as information was obtained.

17. The original site of Bayou Road school is now Joseph S. Clark High School in New Orleans. This site was originally slated to remain designated a school site for "Colored" but went through legal battles to remain that way.

18. The term "7<sup>th</sup> ward" is the New Orleans municipally legislated designation by city code. Historically, Ward 7 extends from west to east Esplanade Ridge to Bayou St. John and Esplanade Avenue to Elysian Fields Avenue; and from south to north, between Claiborne Avenue to Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River. In the local vernacular, the term refers to a more narrow neighborhood extending from along Claiborne Avenue bordered by Esplanade to Elysian Fields to Bayou St. John which was Bienville's original route into the city. It is important to mention that this area is home to Black Creoles in the city; and when locals discuss this area, they infer the tradition of talented Black Creoles, from craftsmen, carpenters, masons, and chefs like Austin Leslie, and the former restaurant "Chez Helene," for whom the t.v. show *Frank's Place* was patterned, to musicians like Jazzman Sidney Bechet, to the famous Homer Plessey—who although a shoemaker was selected by the group of influential African American civic and business leaders to board East Louisiana Railway "separate car" from New Orleans to Covington, from famous photographer Florentine Perrault, Jazz drummer Joe Jones ("You Talk Too Much You Worry Me To Death"), to the Haydel family—known for their education and boasting the first Black doctor in the neighborhood in the 20s and 30s, to the Morial family that gave the city its first Black mayor, "Dutch" and his son, Marc, the former mayor. The Rouzan brothers were famous 7<sup>th</sup> ward builders of the traditional shot-gun homes now deemed historic; their great grand daughter Wanda is a noted singer, song writer.

Seventh ward civic leaders included lawyer A. P. Tureaud, and Dr. Joseph Arthur Hardin who served as a delegate to five Republican National Conventions from 1932 to 1948, and was named Consul of the Republic of Liberia in 1940, and held this position until 1953" (Hardin Public School Bio). Dr. Hardin influenced the city government to provide better facilities for Blacks and at the same time organized Blacks to vote and exert political pressure (Hardin Public School Bio). He organized the New Orleans chapter of the NAACP, the first YMCA, and the first Negro insurance company in Louisiana (Jefferson).

Attorney A. P. Tureaud ushered in a "legacy of Creole Radicalism," according to Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (271). Tureaud, born and raised in the Seventh Ward was "a descendant of antebellum free people of color, and the legatee of a proud Creole protest tradition" (Hirsch and Logsdon 271). He accomplished much in the courts including fighting red-lining by white insurance companies and real estate agents. In addition, he urged the republishing and translation of *Les Cénelles*, the literary legacy of New Orleans' free people of color.

The Seventh Ward remains home to numerous Black Creole institutions which served as

foundations for the assaults on Jim Crow, places such as the Autocrat Club, *The Tribune* newspaper, *The Louisiana Weekly* newspaper, the historic *Sentinel*, and the *Crusader* (Hirsch and Logsdon 271).

19. It is interesting to note that Lakeland, in Point Coupee Parish, is the historical home of distinguished Louisiana writer Ernest Gaines.

20. Both Kaufman siblings Joyce and Donald remember that they played with the white kids at the school yard after hours and in the neighborhood, but were divided in schooling and resources in general.

21. For this information, I owe a large debt of gratitude to film maker Billy Woodbury, who shared his research with me. He is currently making a film on Bob Kaufman.

22. As a result, Kaufman wore a hearing aid.

23. Herbert Rogers is General Information/Reference Librarian at the State Library Resource Center, the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore. Rudolph Lewis, editor of *Marcus Christian* by Xavier U. Press, was also a Reference Librarian at Pratt for a time; and in the process of our correspondence, I was introduced to Herbert. Herbert Rogers is researching and writing on José Luis Gonzalez and contributed the valuable news of the friendship between José Luis Gonzalez and Bob Kaufman, and Gonzalez publishing information.

24. “José Luis Gonzalez lived in Europe where he was an international correspondent from 1950 to 1952. He returned to Puerto Rico briefly in 1952, but in February 1953 resided in Mexico where he became a Mexican citizen in 1955” (Rogers 2/4/99). “Gonzalez was not allowed to enter the U.S. for nearly twenty years for political reasons; he was a Marxist and advocate for Puerto Rico’s independence from the U.S” (Rogers 2/4/99).

25.” ¿ Que se hicieron los aztecas?” Means “What did the Aztecs (themselves) do?” Translated by Herbert Rogers who says that “the title is really a cultural referent. . . . It would be in New York that José Luis Gonzalez first learned about the country that would in (circa) 1955 grant him Mexican citizenship. It was the painting and murals at the New School of Social Research that he would remember. This title also refers to the cultural tradition of a people’s history, unlike the cultural imperialism which the Puerto Rican writer has had to fight against since the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One must remember that the language of instruction in the public schools of Puerto Rico from the early 1900s until 1948 was English” (Rogers 12 December 2000).

26. The long story appears in a book called *Todos los relatos* published by the National University of Mexico in 1992 (Rogers 11/21/00).

27. According to Elouard Burt, Jimmy Carter’s father was one of the first Black dentists in New Orleans. Jimmy went to U.C.L.A. to study dentistry but was black balled for joining the Communist Party. He claimed to have been in San Francisco prior to the Golden Gate bridge. Jimmy was the elder and a commanding influence on the Black poets then, especially Bob.

28. By Montgomery Brothers, Donald must mean Buddy and Monk Montgomery, who became a group so called when joined by their better celebrated brother Wes, Jazz guitarist. Buddy was a pianist and vibraphonist. Monk was bassist, accoustic and electric. In the early 50s, Monk toured with Lionel Hampton's big band. Monk played with Cal Tjader in the mid-60s, then with Red Norvo in Las Vegas until 1972; he died in 1982. Buddy Montgomery played piano in the Slide Hampton group in the early 50s, and worked with Roy Johnson in a quartet in 1954, prior to the formation of The Montgomery-Johnson quintet. Buddy moved to Oakland in the early 80s, playing the Bay Area and touring with Marlena Shaw. He organized the first Oakland festival in 1987, began recording for Landmark in the 80s, and was a contributor to Concord's prestigious solo piano series in 1992. In the mid-50s, the three brothers worked together in the Montgomery-Johnson Quintet with Alonzo Johnson and Robert Johnson, and then as The Mastersounds from 1957 to 1960. The Incredible Jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery is the most famous of the three; he played with greats John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy before going solo. The three—Monk, Buddy, Wes--were not known formerly as The Montgomery Brothers until 1960. Between major gigs, sibling musicians often played together on their own; these were rare performances, but they occurred. The brothers can be heard on CD reissues featuring The Mastersounds and Montgomery Brothers.

29. According to Alan Watts, "the word 'Zen' is Japanese and though Japan is now its home, Zen Buddhism is the creation of T'ang dynasty in China" (331).

30. Transcribed from the tape by permission of Boston State University, Mugar Library's Special Collections Library, the Kaufman papers. Box #3, entitled "Bob Kaufman's rap.

31. This attraction to drugs for a transcendental effects was popularized in books by Carlos Castaneda. His first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, describes the adventures of a UCLA anthropology students documenting research on medicinal plants. He meets a sage named Don Juan Mateus, called don Juan, who was thought to be a "brujo" or shaman, and he teaches the willing student. People still debate whether Castaneda's work is fiction or non fiction. Although Castaneda's books don't appear until 1961, the Yaqui use of hallucinogenic plants was common knowledge and practiced widely for a time.

32. Kathryn V. Lindberg insists that "Kaufman surely resisted the fixed identities" (164), she falls prey to labeling him when she writes "He was and was not black, Jew, Beatnik, . . . junkie" (167). Unfortunately, these negative labels stick, and Kaufman was never a "junkie" in the way such moniker implies.

33. In his papers at Stanford University's Special Collections at Green Library (specifically I viewed M733; Ser 1, Box 34, 336, 204, 315, then Ser 10, Box 2; Ser 2, Box 7, 8), Allen Ginsberg documents occasions when he became high out of his mind on drugs, usually with friends.

34. Anonymous, but overheard from a Rabbi in Baton Rouge, whose name I don't know.

35. Cypress is submerged for most of the year. It sheds its foliage, the gray trunk and limbs bare in winter. It is known as “wood eternal” since it’s been around since the ice age.

36. “(Tillandsia usneoides), a soft, silver-gray, tropical herb with slender leaves and stems that grow on the branches of trees. . . . It is an epiphyte, using tree limbs for mechanical support, but drawing its nutrients from the air. Epiphytes never injure the host plant as do parasites” ©. Ritchie Bell 394).

37. In contemporary nightclubs in West Africa, one can pay a poet to sing their praises, much like in an African American “rap” poem.

38. Such traditional titles passed on by the Oral Tradition are other titles like “Good Lord I have Done,” “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.” Contemporary Gospel songs such as the famous “Precious Lord,” by Tommy Dorsey illustrate the continuance of this practice. Another traditional song heard in most Baptist churches is “Blessed Assurance,” the lines of which state: “this is my story,/ this is my song,/ praising my Savior,/ all the day long.” Praising the Lord is an inherent cultural given in the Black community and is practiced widely across religions.

39. Bob Kaufman wrote by hand this way, sometimes in all caps for emphasis, sometimes in small caps, always in lettering, rarely cursive. For each collection, when Eileen reviewed a manuscript with him, he insisted that the final copy reflected how he “wrote it down.” The result is that when poem titles are capitalized, this is what Bob Kaufman wanted. The usage of capitals and small caps varies collection to collection.

40. Bessie Smith was born poor and orphaned early. In her short life, 1894-1937, she was the greatest blues singer of her time, recording over 160 songs between 1923 and 1933. Influenced by Ma Rainey, she performed widely throughout the south before recording with Jazz legends as Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, and Coleman Hawkins, but Smith was the star. Larger than life until the Depression hit, she continued touring when she was killed in a car accident in Mississippi. Some current speculation suggests that she was refused admittance to a whites-only hospital and as a result bled to death; some believe she died of her injuries at the scene.

41. Transcribed from a cassette tape in Box #3, entitled “Bob Kaufman’s rap,” used here by permission of Boston State University, Mugar Library’s Special Collections, the Kaufman papers.

42. In the novel *Cannery Row*, the Doc character has a lab—Western Biological; the fictional Doc was named for a friend of Steinbeck, Edward Flanders Ricketts, a marine biologist, Founder of Pacific Biological, a marine lab eventually housed on Cannery Row in Monterey; he was an astute observer of coastal life, sharing with Steinbeck an appreciation of all kinds of people and the environment (The Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies, screen 2).

43. This use of stolen may also, in Kaufman’s surreal thinking, allude to Ginsberg’s early troubles with the law. “Herbert Hunkeie, Jack Melody, and Vickie Russell were arrested for

operating a burglary ring out of Ginsberg's apartment in spring 1949, which caused Ginsberg to be suspended from Columbia University, and for which he spent eight months in Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute where he met Carl Solomon" (Theado 230).

44. The syllable count in standard Haiku is 5-7-5. In "Mingus," the first line has six syllables, the second line, seven, and the final line six.

45. A broadside is a poetry poster, which is an old publishing tradition. The earliest recorded poem by an African American is the broadside by Lucy Terry, called "Bars Flight."

46. Decades of debate question whether the "Te Deum" was written by St. Augustine or St. Ambrose, but scholars generally attribute its use at the baptism of St. Augustine (newadvent.org, screens 1-6).

47. Schoenberg is more widely known as a composer, not as a painter (Magnusson 1309). Kaufman displays the richness of his reading and research.

48. Or is it the crosspiece between the legs of a chair?

49. Kaufman was never jailed in New York but spent some time at Bellevue hospital. These poems are from the San Francisco jail times, specifically 1959, a tumultuous year for him.

50. Of course, Arab countries also invaded Egypt.

51. Since his German Jewish grandfather married a Creole Negro, this was queer behavior. See biographical section for details.

52. Being outspoken was part of his personality, tied to how he expressed himself as a child. Add to that his surrealistic criticisms and humor, it is not difficult to imagine that he upset cops easily; and instead of keeping quiet, he just continued on a roll, probably beyond the understanding of a street cop, who wanted no discussion, just blind obedience. Well, obedient is not a word one uses to describe Bob Kaufman.

53. In Chinese, the letter X may sound like the French G (sounds like gee) [ʒe], an a non-Chinese speaker might easily attempt to spell it J. So it by this spelling, pinning this down is interesting but difficult.

54. The next line is also the source for the title of a book by Mel Clay, *Jazz Jails and God, an Impressionistic Biography*, which is more tribute than biography, more about Clay than Kaufman, but has a useful though outdated bibliography on Kaufman.

55. Published in 1959, this ideal prophecies John Fitzgerald Kennedy's Presidency, which

according to Kaufman's Abomunist ideal, was a dream come true. It is no wonder he took the President Kennedy's death so hard, enough to vow a decade of silence.

56. Here after, Abomunists will be referred to Abos, a shortened form.

57. From "Jazz as Exoticism in Harlem Renaissance Literature," presented at the American Literature Conference, May 31, 1996.

58. It might be interesting to note that the first published poem by an African in America, Lucy Terry's "Bars Flight," the only published account of an Indian raid, was published as a broadside or poetry poster as well and solidified her reputation and documented a historical event.

59. See Lawrence Levine in the chapter "Laughing at the Man" (300-366).

60. Marie Laveau was a sincere practitioner of Voodoo as a religion, popular usage sometimes reduces her to being a "bogey man."

61. The other significant poems, "Second April," "Voyagers," "Sunken Bakeries of Total Recall," and "Image of the Wind," are excluded only because I ran out of time to edit those sections properly.



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## **Appendix A: Black Beat Chronology**

## Black Beat Chronology

18 April 1925	Bob Kaufman, born in New Orleans
21 August 1925	Bob is baptized at Corpus Christi Church, 7 <sup>th</sup> Ward in New Orleans
1935	John Birks Gillespie moves to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Joins musician's union and Frankie Fairfax Band; acquires the nickname "Dizzy." Writes first big band arrangement
1937	Charlie Parker's son, Leon Francis Parker, is born.  Parker returns home for the burial of his father, who was stabbed to death in a quarrel.
19 January 1938	Bob applies for a Boy Scouts of America Merit Badge
20 May 1938	Bob's father, Joséph Emmet Kaufman dies
1939	Dizzy joins Cab Calloway Orchestra. Records with Lionel Hampton as first modern-jazz stylist. Jam session at Minton's Playhouse begins.  Dizzy Gillespie meets Charlie Parker at the Booker T. Hotel in Kansas City.
1940	Dizzy's original compositions recorded.
1941	New York. Dizzy's first recordings of modern-jazz jam session at Minton's  Charlie Parker jams frequently at Minton's in Harlem with Diz, Monk, Charlie Christian, Bud Powell, Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, and John Simmons.  Dizzy Gillespie separated from Cab's Orchestra
18 June 1942	Bob is certified as Messman by the U.S. Shipping Commissioner, Port of New Orleans, and becomes a Merchant Seaman
1942	Dizzy composes "A Night in Tunisia" and "Salt Peanuts."

	Dizzy establishes and leads his quartet.
24 June 1942	Bob ships out as “Utility” from Galveston, Texas on the Winfield Scott, a steam vessel headed for “nearby foreign” waters
10 September 1942	Bob is discharged from the Winfield Scott in New York city.
1940s	Bob Kaufman becomes a regular at the School of Social Research, New York.
1943	Dizzy Gillespie first records with Charlie Parker
27 September 1943	Bob ships out as “Messman” from Boston, MA on the SS George B. Selden, a steam vessel for foreign waters
1 January 1944	Bob is discharged from the Selden in New York
1944	Dizzy composes “Bebop”
10 February 1944	Bob is now “Utility Messman” and ships out from Philadelphia, PA on the S.S. James B. eds, a steam vessel for foreign waters.
11 May 1944	Bob suffers from a toothache, was late at routine boarding, received a complaint, but no charges were filed because he saw a dentist
13 May 1944	Bob is discharged from the Eds in Calcutta, India
22 June 1944	Bob ships out from Calcutta, India on the S.S. Harold L. Winslow, a steam vessel for foreign waters
28 August 1944	Bob discharged from the Winslow in New York Various voyages to foreign waters.
1945	Charlie Parker plays on and off 52 <sup>nd</sup> Street with Ben Webster and Dizzy. He has his own group at the Three Deuces, where he features Miles Davis.
10 March 1945	Bob applies for and receives duplicate certificate of

	seaworthiness, is upgraded to Steward's department working for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> cook
11 August 1945	Bob is reexamined, passes competence for handling food
1946	<p>July 29<sup>th</sup>, Charlie Parker is in bad condition during "Lover Man" recording date for Dial. Suffers a breakdown that evening and taken to Camarillo State Hospital.</p> <p>A benefit for Bird is held in L.A., in December. \$500 is raised to obtain instrument and clothes for him.</p>
11 October 1947	Bob Kaufman is officially discharged from the S.S. River Raisin in New York, and leaves the Merchant Marine Service
1947-48	Befriends Puerto Rican Poet, José Luis Gonzalez
1948	Parker plays at the Royal Roost and Bop City until 1949.
1949	<p>Charlie Parker Plays at the International Jazz Festival in Paris.</p> <p>Late in the year, Birdland, a club named in his honor, opens.</p>
1950	<p>Parker plays often at Birdland.</p> <p>In July, Parker begins a common-law marriage with Chan Richardson. She bears him two children: Pere, a girl; and Barid, a boy.</p>
23 June 1958	Bob Kaufman married Eileen in San Francisco
1959	<i>Abomunist Manifesto</i> , poem, published as a broadside, San Francisco: City Lights.
1959	<i>Second April</i> , poem, published as a broadside, S.F.: City Lights.
1959	<i>Does the Secret Mind Whisper</i> , surrealist novel opening published as a broadside by City Lights.
1959	Rice, Ron. <i>The Flower Thief</i> , film.

- 1959 Tynan, Kenneth. *Dissent in the Arts in America*, film.
- 9 May 1959 *Beatitude*, Number 1, published in S.F.'s North Beach at 25 cents a copy, co-founded by Bob Kaufman, Allen Ginsberg, William J. Margolis, & John Kelly (with assistance of Eileen Kaufman).
- 1960 *Beat Scene*, anthology, New York: Cornith Books.
- Umbra*, journal, check for date and work.
- 1962 Bob Kaufman Rapping, a recorded reading, Boston University, Special Collections
- 1962 *Isolation Booth*, novel, with Lou Morheim, published, London: Muller.
- 1965 *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*, Bob Kaufman's first collection, published, New York: New Directions.
- 1965 Bob Kaufman appears thinly disguised as "Chuck Berman" in Jack Kerouac's novel *Desolation Angels* (NY: Coward, McCainn & Geoghegan.)
- 1967 *Golden Sardines*, Bob Kaufman's second collection published, S.F.: City Lights
- March 1967 Nilon, Charles. "Bob Kaufman: Black Speech. . . ." American Culture Association/ Popular Culture Association Conference, Montreal
- 1969 *New Black Poetry*, anthology, N.Y.: International Publishers.
- 1972 PBS broadcast, "Coming from Bob Kaufman, Poet," includes the work of Bob Kaufman whose poems are read by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee
- 31 March 1973 Bob Kaufman recites the entire *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot at the Palo Alto Culture Center exhibition of North Beach photographer Jean Dierkes-Carlisle

31 May 1975	Tape recorded reading of Bob Kaufman "Second April," in Marin; Boston University, Special Collections
4 July 1975	Tape recorded reading at "Rainbow Sign," Boston University, Special Collections.
1975	Neighborhood Arts Gallery Reading entitled "Night of Street Poetry" featuring Bob Kaufman with A.D. Winans and Jack Micheline.
7 August 1975	Bob Kaufman reads at Malvinas, <i>Beatitude</i> Benefit
21 February 1976	Bob's letter to Tony Seymour regarding his "No Gods to Guide" project (with Bob as subject) in progress
29 August 1976	Tape recording of "Bob's Rap," Marin, California, Boston University, Special Collections
6 September 1976	Bob Kaufman and Eileen Kaufman remarry atop Mt. Tamalpais on Bolinas Ridge, Marin, California.
1976	Kesey, Ken. "Ken Kesey's First Poetic Hoo Haw," video of Bob Kaufman reading his Poetry in Eugene, Oregon
February 1977	Bob Kaufman thrown out of his home, found sleeping on the floor of a store front in the Mission; he had bronchitis going into pneumonia, and moved in with Jean Dirkes-Carlisle's flat at California & Presidio with her son Dean Antony and cat Greta Garbo.
1979	Hotel Dante burns; Raymond Foye recovers Bob's poems which become the manuscript for <i>The Ancient Rain</i> poems.
1979	Bob moves in with Neeli Cherkovski, poet, for 4-6 months.
1980	Tape recording of "Andre's Benefit," Boston University, Special Collections.
1981	<i>The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956-1978</i> by Bob Kaufman published by New Directions, edited by Raymond Foye
1981	Bob meets poet Lynne Wildey through Gene Ruggles and Sue Kubley-Mea at the Grant Street Fair; Lynne moved in



	with Bob at the Swiss-American Hotel, where he had been living.
1981	Bob Kaufman is awarded \$12,500 by the National Endowment for the Arts.
April 1982	Lynne Wildey throws Bob Kaufman a big birthday bash, with German writer John Kliphan
16 December 1982	Musical score by Steve Lacy put to “Morning Joy” by Bob Kaufman
1983	Winans, A.D. “Bob Kaufman,” in Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 16, <i>The Beats: Literary Bohemians in Postwar America</i> .
1984	Felver, Chris, and Gerald Nicosia. “West Coast: Beat and Beyond,” Sixty-minute video program shown on KQED Channel 9, San Francisco
1985	In 1985, the <i>Silver Anniversary Beatitude</i> issue is dedicated to Bob Kaufman; and in that issue, editor Jeffry Grossman confirms that Bob Kaufman coined the word “Beatnik,” not Herb Caen of <i>The San Francisco Chronicle</i> , though Caen did popularize its usage especially in a negative way.
19 December 1985	Bob Kaufman and Steve Lacy register score and lyrics of “Morning Joy” with the Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique (S.A.C.E.M.)
12 January 1986	Bob Kaufman dies of emphysema; his work and legend remain.
16 January 1986	<i>Le Monde</i> , “Mort du poète américain Bob Kaufman,” page 11, the French obituary.
23 January 1986	Memorial gathering for Bob Kaufman outside Café Trieste at Vallejo & Grant. George, his brother, Parker, Bob’s son, Eileen, his widow, Tom Keats’ Dixieland band provide a Jazz tribute; Lynne Wildey, all there; Jack Micheline, plus other friends eulogize him. Bob’s ashes scattered in the San Francisco Bay, half-way between the City and Alcatraz.

- 23 January 1986 Open Reading for Bob Kaufman, Meat Market Coffee House, 4123 --24<sup>th</sup> Street, S.F., from 7-9 p.m.
- 5 February 1986 John Kliphan dedicates his literary reading at Librairie Pensée Sauvage to Bob Kaufman and reads the entire "Abomunist Manifesto" in his honor to an enthusiastic audience.
- 1986 The Bob Kaufman Collective publishes *Closing Time till Dawn*, by Bob Kaufman and Janice Blue; Collective Logo and Cover Woodcut of Bob Kaufman by Kristen Wetterhahn; 24 pps.
- 26 January 1987 Mayor Diane Feinstein proclaims Bob Kaufman Day in San Francisco.
- 1987 Kaufman, Eileen. "Laughter Sounds Orange at Night," in *The Beat Vision*. (New York: Paragon House). 258-267.
- 1987-1988 Henderson, David. Four-hour program for KPFA-FM radio, Berkeley, "A Tribute to Bob Kaufman
- 11 April 1987 First Bob Kaufman Day in San Francisco.
- March 1988 In the *Verwendung*, poetry collection, two of Bob Kaufman's poems appear: "Cincophreneticpoet," and "Grandfather was Queer, Too," which are translated into German, and an excerpt from Mel Clay's *Impressionistic Biography*.
- 14-15 May 1988 Bob Kaufman's poems on 45 RPM; "A (Buddhist) Experience," on side 1; 5:10, RP 17910; on side 2: "Dolorous Echo, Response (for Eileen)," 5:42; recorded and produced Music by The Local Moon, Rene le Doil, Ronald Lippok, with oboe, dolce, percussion, e-max, traktor, mix, guitar, clarinette, ethno brass at Gunther Krex Studio; Derwendung heft 4.
- Fall 1988 Maria Damon publishes "Unmeaning Jargon/ Uncanonized Beatitude: Bob Kaufman Poet," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 4, 701-741, Duke University Press.
- Fall 1988 Dr. Henry C. Lacey publishes "In Memory of Bob

- Kaufman: A Son of Rue Miro,” *The Chicory Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1., New Orleans.1
- Fall 1988 *The Chicago Review*, see.
- September 1988 In the, *Verwendung*, poetry collection; writer John Kliphan’s “Eine Reminiszenz” his remembering of Bob Kaufman
- 1989 Bob Kaufman’s “Response” for Eileen, produced on Compact Disk entitled *Made to Measure, Vol. 19*; “*When God Was Famous*,” (*A Tribute to Poetry*), Samy Birnbach & Benjamin Lew; LC 8689 [Made to Measure, 43, Rue General Patton, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
- 1989 Hirschman, Jack, ed. *Would You Wear My Eyes?: A Tribute to Bob Kaufman*, (San Francisco: The Bob Kaufman Collective, 1989).
- Summer 1990 Rene Arroyo publishes “Bob Kaufman, Dialogues of an American Caliban,” *Shooting Star Review*, Vol. 4.No. 2, 25, 28-30.
- 5 June 1991 Pacifica Radio announcement of “Bob Kaufman, Poet, An Audio Documentary” to air appears in the *Village Voice Literary Supplement*.
- 10 June 1991 Pacifica Radio’s “Bob Kaufman, Poet, Audio Documentary” airs in New York area from 9-11 p.m..
- April 1992 *Beatitude Poetry International* emerges from North Beach with Eileen Kaufman at the helm and the support of many writers  
Vols. I through III, published in 1992.
- 3 September-Oct. 1992 “Beat,” a theatre piece conceived and directed by Anthony St. Martin, told in the poetry of eight San Francisco Beat poets: Gregory Corso, Diane DiPrima, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufman, Jack Kerouac, Michael McClure, and Gary Snyder premiers
- February 1992 Saloy, Mona Lisa. "Bob Kaufman: The Black American

- Rimbaud," African Americans in Europe Conference, University of Paris, Sorbonne Nouvelle, February 1992.
- 1993 Damon, Maria. "Unmeaning Jargon"/ Uncanonized Beatitude: Bob Kaufman, Poet," *The Dark End of the Street, Margins in American Vanguard Poetry*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- 4 February 1995 *Cranial Guitar* negotiation with Coffee House Press relayed to Eileen Kaufman by letter from Gerald Nocosia, writer.
- 7 February 1995 Eileen Kaufman grants permission to The Buddhist Ray, Inc., a not-for-profit organization preparing an anthology of the Buddhist writings of the Beat Generation to be published by The Putnam Publishing Group to publish Bob Kaufman's "A Buddhist Experience."
- November 1995 Saloy, Mona Lisa. "Black Beats and Black Issues," *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995.
- 1996 *Cranial Guitar: Selected Poems by Bob Kaufman*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 1996.
- 17 March 1996 Clark, Tom. "Enduring Verse from Poet of the Streets," *The San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*. Book Review. March 17, 1996. 9.
- 1 October 1999 Johnson, Ronna C. and Maria Damon. "Recapturing the Skipped Beats," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. October 1, 1999. B6.
- 5 February 1999 Elie, Lolis Eric. "Beat Begotten by N.O. Native," *The Times Picayune*. Metro section. February 5, 1999. B1.
- Summer 2000 Abbott, Steve. "Hidden Master of the Beats," *The Asheville Review*. 10 *Great Neglected Poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. 7(2000)1. 166-172.
- Summer 2000 Hirschman, Jack. "Bob Kaufman: A Remembrance," *The Asheville Review*. 10 *Great Neglected Poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. 7(2000)1. 173-176.

**Appendix B: Lynne Wildey Letter to Mona Lisa Saloy**

Lynne Wildey  
New College of Ca.  
Library  
50 Fell St.  
San Francisco  
Ca. 94110

Nov. 2nd. '88

944-4175  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Dear Mona Lisa,

Beg Pardon for taking so long to write; I remember when we spoke just prior to your exodus from the Bay Area that I had promised to send you some poems, and never did due to more attention needed for Bob (and Robt. Duncan). Those poems are obsolete now, but I enclose a few ~~from 1986~~ others.

Recently the Kaufman family has been under duress, Bobs sister Olivia (who lives here in the Haight with her husband and family) has been ill with the same problems Bob suffered. And another sister from Martinique is being nursed in New Orleans by sister Marion. Marion is the family historian, and has expressed pleasure at the thought of having you over, but isn't quite sure when. I thought perhaps a nice introduction would be for me to send to you a copy of the four-hour show about Bobs life which I assisted David Henderson in assembling for K.P.F.A., this would allow you to make a copy and then you could deliver it to Marion (who is a very charming and refined lady).

Incidentally, I met Yusef Komenyakka at Natl. Poetry Week (by fortunate chance), he says he will be seeing you over the holidays. I was interested to learn that he teaches Bobs poetry, and promised to mail him one of Barbara Christians ~~epic~~ epic pieces about Bobs work, I also told him by then I will have the tapes in your hands. I am enclosing Marions address and phone, and leave it up to you both to find a copacetic timing. Marion said she thinks it would be fine to give you some family history on tape. (Just fine).

As you can see from the enclosed article about the 'street-naming' it was the Live poet, Gregory Corso, who stole the day from 'the dead'. We had a good poetry reading for Giggie at New College, thence he flew to New York to put three years of his Rome work in a New Directions edition.

Around here we've been gnashing our teeth some at the Presidential competition, we see they finally let Jesse have a few words, after it became clear Dukakis is lagging. Bill Stroud (black poet), my partner from the Jackson Campaign, and I are running a flatbed around town this coming Saturday as a G.O.T.V. incentive, in the

Projects and Third World neighborhoods. I sure do like to get some of the kids (especially teenagers) roused up in interest. The streets in Bayview-Hunters Point here, have become much more dangerous in the past year, due to crack. It's most noticable among the II-16yr. old range, as they have no past history to go on, and very little in the way of a future. A street-gang social worker veteran says these new gangs are frightening, because old-style gangs had loyalties, and futures they worked for, but that these kids have no loyalties but dope or dollars (street <sup>consciousness</sup> supplies), and will easily turn on companions for profit. Now, my neighbors and I call each other if we need to go to the store after dark. My poor father writes that he hopes I'll soon have the money to move out of the ghetto, and I just don't know how to tell him that I'm here for a reason, without upsetting him too much.

Some nice things are happening with my collection for the book, Al Young called up recently, spent a lot of time talking and listening, was very sweet and helpful (encouraging) and has some ideas for a good piece. I am wrestling with some darker information, how to allude to these problematic truths in a spiritual AND untacky light. (Mercy for the living).

Apart from this I babysit and study Spanish with friends at the bookshop, basically the continuing furors of possessiveness about Bob have driven me further from social life, excepting the rare few gallant occasions; which is truly no loss.

Thanks for your consideration  
Yours Sincerely



Lynne Wildey

## Vita

Author, Folklorist, Mona Lisa Saloy is an Associate Professor of English, Director of Creative Writing at Dillard University. Saloy won the 2005 T.S. Eliot Prize in Poetry from Truman State University Press, and they will publish her collection of poems "Red Beans and Ricely Yours," this year. Saloy won fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and from the United Negro College Fund/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, to continue her research on Black Beat poet Bob Kaufman, who served as an important link to the Black Arts Movement. She received the M.F.A. at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, the M.A. in creative writing at San Francisco State University, and the B.A. at the University of Washington in Seattle. Occasionally, Mona Lisa Saloy writes and reads cultural commentaries on the Black historical 7<sup>th</sup> Ward neighborhood for Public Radio, WWNO, 89.9 fm.

Mona Lisa Saloy's most recent publication of poetry, "The 'N' Word, "For My Sister," and "We've Come This Far," appears in the anthology *Furious Flower: African American Poetry from the Black Arts Movement to the Present*. Joanne V. Gabbin, Ed. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004; other published poems include "Shot-gun life," which appears in the Faulkner Society's *Double Dealer*, December 2003, and in *Cultural Vistas*, the Louisiana Purchase issue from Winter 2003; a publication in prose "A Night in St. Tammany Parish," appears in *Callaloo*. 24.1(2001)162-163. Her scholarship on the Beats appears in "Black Beats and Black Issues," *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965*. Lisa Phillips, ed. NY: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995.153-165. Her recent ethnographic articles are "Still Laughing to Keep from Crying: Black Humor," *Louisiana Folklife Festival Guide*. Monroe & Baton Rouge: Louisiana Division of Folklife, 2001. 14-15; and "New Orleans



Lagniappe: Terms of our Endearment,” *Ties that Bind: Making Family New Orleans Style*. New Orleans: Ashé Cultural Center and Ebon Images, 2001.53-59. She is included in *My Mother Had a Dream, African-American Women share Their Mothers Words of Wisdom*. Tamara Nikuradse, ed., New York: Dutton, the Penguin Group, 1996.

Also, Ms Saloy’s verse appears in *Word Works*, a film by Betsy Weiss, part of *Poets in the Dream State: An Anthology of Louisiana Writers*, NOVAC 2001; *Louisiana English Journal*, 1(7)2000; *Cultural Vistas* 11.2(2000)83; *Louisiana Literature*, 1999; *Double Dealer Redux* 1998; *Ishmael Reed’s Konch*, 1997.

Some of Mona Lisa Saloy's earlier poems appear in *Immortelles, Poems of Life and Death by New Southern Writers*, New Orleans: Xavier Review Press, 1995, and in 1994 *The Southern Review*. She is featured in The American Poetry Archives video anthology, *Color: A Sampling of Contemporary African American Writers*, 1994; *Louisiana English Journal*, 1994; *African American Review*, 1993. She is in the seminal *Louisiana Women Writers, New Essays and a Comprehensive Bibliography*, edited by Brown and Ewell, from LSU Press, 1992.

In 2003, as Folklorist, Saloy was the W.W. Law lecturer for the Savannah Black Heritage Festival, presenting her research on “Sidewalk Songs, Jump-Rope Rhymes, and Clap-Hand Games of African American Kids.” In 1991, Saloy was Writer-in-Residence for the City of Plaquemine Activity Center (COPAC). Previous awards are the 1993 Delta Sigma Theta's *ARTIE*, and the 1989 "Arts Excellence Award" in literature; in 1984, a National Endowment for the Arts supported post as Poet-in-Residence at the San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society. Mona Lisa says that she writes to speak for those who don't, to learn their lessons, and to celebrate their spirits.